

OCTOBER 1959 VOLUME 6 No 10

The London Magazine

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A monthly review of literature

Christopher Isherwood

A new long story

MR LANCASTER

NEW POEMS

by Sylvia Plath, Hilary Corke, Iain Crichton Smith
and Richard Kell

C. P. SNOW

A Reply to Herbert Read

Book Reviews by Roy Fuller, Thom Gunn, Jean Stewart,
Elizabeth Jennings, Alan Ross and G. J. Warnock

EDITED BY JOHN LEHMANN

THREE SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE

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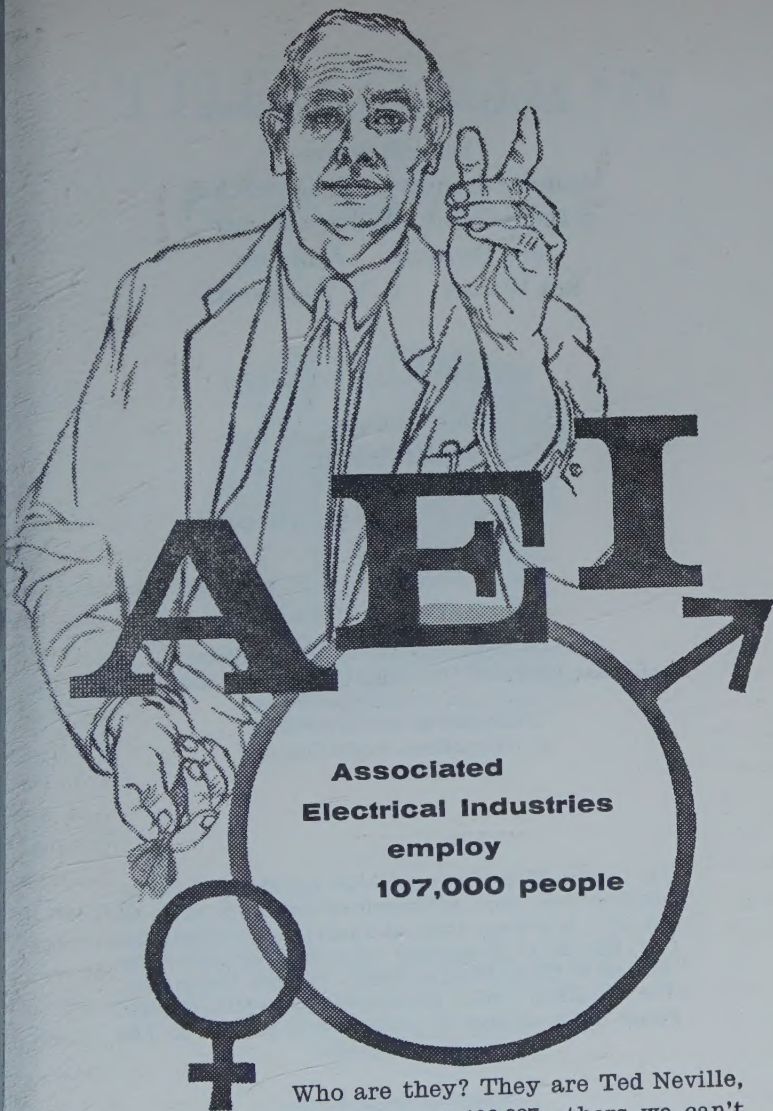
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The Reader's Digest



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Who are they? They are Ted Neville, Bob Lennox, Harry Green—and 106,997 others we can't talk about here. Ted Neville spends his spare time riding surf on Bondi beach and his working hours as a motor tester in the A.E.I. (Pty) factory at Auburn, Sydney. Bob Lennox, a machinist in the A.E.I. turbine works at Larne in Ulster, plays darts for the team at his local. Harry Green is a research scientist in the A.E.I. laboratories at Aldermaston and says his children leave him no spare time at all.



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THE LONDON MAGAZINE



EDITED BY

John Lehmann

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—FABER & FABER—

Contents



Foreword		7
Two Poems	<i>Sylvia Plath</i>	11
Pompeii	<i>Hilary Corke</i>	14
Love Songs of a Puritan	<i>Iain Crichton Smith</i>	15
Mr Lancaster	<i>Christopher Isherwood</i>	17
Empsonium	<i>Richard Kell</i>	55
Correspondence		57
Book Reviews by Roy Fuller 60, Thom Gunn 61, Jean Stewart 64, Elizabeth Jennings 67, Alan Ross 71, G. J. Warnock 77		
Notes About Our Authors		80

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CHATTO & WINDUS

Foreword

When, in the Spring of 1936, the first volume of *New Writing* was published, critics and readers were quick to single out a long short story, 'The Nowaks', by Christopher Isherwood, as one of the most remarkable contributions. 'The Nowaks' was the first of that wonderful series of stories and diary extracts, all originally forming part of a never-to-be-executed plan for a huge novel, *The Lost*, the ambitious outline of which was nevertheless still visible through the volume into which they were collected, *Goodbye to Berlin*, and its companion novel *Mr Norris Changes Trains*. With these two books Christopher Isherwood's reputation was made; and it is an extraordinary proof of the hold they have had on the imagination of our time that the paper-back editions are still sold in thousands and a successful play and a film have been made out of them in the last few years. Like so many English novelists of the last half century, Christopher Isherwood shot away into fame as a brilliant entertainer, a creator of comic characters who explored refreshingly novel territory: but it is doubtful if he would have lasted in orbit half as long if he had not at the same time had a deep compassionate understanding of human misfortune and failure—and a masterly sense of anti-mandarin style.

The conception of *The Lost* appears to have been one of those basic fertilizing ideas that haunt a creative writer through most of his career: for now, after nearly a quarter of a century, Christopher Isherwood is again at work on a book, again consisting of self-contained episodes shaped from the materials assembled for a much longer work, with the same psychological impulse behind it. *Mr Lancaster* is the first of these episodes; and we consider it so important that we are devoting almost the whole of this number to it. Curious students of the autobiographical line behind the author's work will observe that it appears to take place in a hitherto unsuspected time-pocket between the last scenes of *Lion and Shadows* and the Berlin stories.

We are all great enthusiasts for the celebration of anniversaries nowadays, and some of our national newspapers have recently been recalling the events of the Autumn of 1939 on their twentieth anniversary. This is, perhaps, not an inopportune moment, therefore, to remember one of the minor but most singular of those events, the 'Auden-Isherwood' affair, which went on reverberating during most of the war. One of the odder traits of the British, foreigners must surely sometimes reflect, is the degree of resentment they feel against any fellow countryman who decides to live abroad.

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FOREWORD

The wish to escape a disagreeable climate, a cruel puritanism in matters of sex, or a rapacious system of taxation is treated with all the fury of prefects at an old-fashioned public school towards boys who dislike taking part in humiliating and meaningless customs. This trait seems to have grown stronger since the war: the campaigns against certain writers and artists who have preferred to live, not even under foreign jurisdiction but in other parts of the Commonwealth, have been bewildering in their virulence. The campaign against Auden and Isherwood was an expression of exactly the same basic resentment, but complicated by the accusation that, having been among the intellectual leaders of the anti-fascist movement, they had run away at the last moment to avoid military service and being bombed. The fact that they had decided to live in America—and become American citizens—some time even before Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia, was ignored, or assumed quite simply to be a falsehood; the other important fact, that one of them had become a conscientious pacifist and the other had put himself at the disposal of the British authorities, was scoffed at if known. Scapegoats they remained: scapegoats, in the minds of many who had never read a word they had written, for a left-wing generation that was irrationally felt to be responsible for the war.

Whether they were harmed as artists by the move they had made, it is not my purpose to argue here; but as Auden himself has written in his poem on the death of W. B. Yeats, Time

Worships language and forgives

Everyone by whom it lives . . .

Nobody in the future is going to worry about the 'Auden-Isherwood affair'. Nobody will be much interested in anything except what they have given the world as artists. If that truth about artists were more generally recognized, even those who find it disagreeable to swallow might see that it is no use expecting these necessary freaks of nature to conform to the school code. An original creative artist, under the compulsion to question convention at every point and realize his own moral vision, must be allowed to make his own mistakes as well as his own positive discoveries. He stands at a certain distance from himself, able to accept what might, with a pseudo-artist, harden into inhibition, as grist for his mill. If he eventually feels sorry to have changed his country, or guilt at having missed a battle in which his friends were involved, the regret and the guilt become part of the experience on which he builds his art. If they have enlarged his vision, the rest of us should only feel glad.

JOHN LEHMANN

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SYLVIA PLATH

Two Poems



IN MIDAS' COUNTRY

Meadows of gold dust. The silver
Currents of the Connecticut fan
And meander in bland pleatings under
River-verge farms where rye-heads whiten.
All's polished to a dull lustre

In the sulphurous noon. We move
With the languor of idols below
The sky's great bell glass and briefly engrave
Our limbs' image on a field of straw
And goldenrod as on gold leaf.

It might be heaven, this static
Plenitude: apples gold on the bough,
Goldfinch, goldfish, golden tiger cat stock-
Still in one gigantic tapestry—
And lovers affable, dovelike.

But now the water-skiers race,
Bracing their knees. On unseen towlines
They cleave the river's greening patinas;
The mirror quivers to smithereens.
They stunt like clowns in the circus.

So we are hauled, though we would stop
On this amber bank where grasses bleach.
Already the farmer's after his crop,
August gives over its Midas touch,
Wind bares a flintier landscape.

SYLVIA PLATH
THE THIN PEOPLE

They are always with us, the thin people
Meagre of dimension as the grey people

On a movie-screen. They
Are unreal, we say:

It was only in a movie, it was only
In a war making evil headlines when we

Were small that they famished and
Grew so lean and would not round

Out their stalky limbs again though peace
Plumped the bellies of the mice

Under the meanest table.
It was during the long hunger-battle

They found their talent to persevere
In thinness, to come, later,

Into our bad dreams, their menace
Not guns, not abuses,

But a thin silence.
Wrapped in flea-ridden donkey skins,

Empty of complaint, forever
Drinking vinegar from tin cups: they wore

The insufferable nimbus of the lot-drawn
Scapegoat. But so thin,

So weedy a race could not remain in dreams,
Could not remain outlandish victims

In the contracted country of the head
Any more than the old woman in her mud hut could

Keep from cutting fat meat
Out of the side of the generous moon when it

TWO POEMS

Set foot nightly in her yard
Until her knife had pared

The moon to a rind of little light.
Now the thin people do not obliterate

Themselves as the dawn
Greyness blues, reddens, and the outline

Of the world comes clear and fills with colour.
They persist in the sunlit room: the wallpaper

Frieze of cabbage-roses and cornflowers pales
Under their thin-lipped smiles,

Their withering kingship.
How they prop each other up!

We own no wildernesses rich and deep enough
For stronghold against their stiff

Battalions. See, how the tree boles flatten
And lose their good browns

If the thin people simply stand in the forest,
Making the world go thin as a wasp's nest

And greyer; not even moving their bones.

Pompeii



What did they do at Pompeii? Go away?
Well, they could go: the world was wide enough,
Three miles would clear them, anywhere would do,
There were other towns and farms in Italy.
Under a fat vineyard something heaved—
High time to pack and scarper? The volcano
However was always there, making particular
Rumblings the less cogent. In the atrium
The new fresco of cupids by Pidonius
Was much admired and would be hard to leave:
Four cows were heavy in calf: the soil besides
Was hugely fertile, sulphur in the tilth,
The grapes grew there like grapefruit. Even when
The earth shook almost open and the cone
Sprouted in giant feathers, it was not
Too late: but let us see what Polpius does,
Whose brother's of the guild of geologists . . .
Running, loving, crouching by pots of gold,
Poor souls, the fire preserved you where you lay;
At which we stare and poke in the museum today.

Our case is somewhat different though not quite—
No matter if history points an altered gun:
Burning by fire or fire will all be one;
Dying in any hour is fall of night.
How constant the rumblings are, yet what's to be done
But till our vineyards, paint our atria,
Pay formal visits to the homes of friends,
Love and beget and do what we should do,
Now the whole world is one volcano grown;
And though we would fly, there is nowhere to fly to?

Love Songs of a Puritan



I

You've put salt on my bread
and black sparks in my eye.
The hole in my side
is packed with God and devilry.

Your coiled hair gleams my death.
In bare Eden there springs up
a green snake with a red mouth.
It shoots from a rocky map.

If all were honey, this an album,
and toy poems were my pride
I'd not remember the ripped scream
and the reaped zone of the full bride.

As if one should write theology
and be dumb on heresies and the cross
or turn a blind and gentle eye
to the scorching apples in your dress.

Therefore from this old see-saw
let me jerk upward to my joy
according to the brutal law:
'To every man his own boy.'

II

My eyes are heresies to the clear
and grave theology yours speak to me.
I make a Luther in your catholic air
though speechless sermons should have made me free

God has the devil for shadow and I too
strike long diagonals at your angel's step.

All my religion would awake to you
if you would, shining, grant me blinding sleep.

III

The day's in love with you as suns with gardens
(The dappled shade shakes thought across your brow)
If this is prison you spread out your pardons
for all dark sentences we suffer now.

You govern guilt by innocence, and dungeons
open like leaves to green and cool keys:
the twisted inmates straighten like a conscience
and, by your glance, all shufflers stand at ease.

And all the darkness gathers light about it
to hide its devilish shame as devils do.
If this is heresy can devils doubt it
who've made their best theology of you?

No mineral in your earth to tempt to stealing:
such tender shadows merely can provoke
the longing for a perfectness of feeling
we've almost spoken but we never spoke.

For only at rarest moments can we scent it,
the garden we have lost and cannot find:
and you the shining page that clearly meant it
already turn to print across the mind.

IV

I know a young girl of great wit
who walks like Venus in her stylish gait
and some would say: 'Conceit', but I would say,
'A sun contents us if the clouds are grey,'
and also: 'Have you seen between the stones
the water running as the water runs?'

All things that speak of surety and grace
proclaim us heretic from our proper place
though venomous devils preach against the light
which opens heavens at her precious feet.
Yet even these, by sneers and laughs, make known
the dear theology they now disown.

Mr Lancaster



Long, long ago—psychologically speaking, back in my Stone Age; historically, in the Spring of 1928 when I was twenty-three years old—I was invited by Mr Lancaster to come and stay with him at a harbour city in North Germany, where he managed the offices of a British shipping firm. Mr Lancaster was the stepson of my grandmother's brother-in-law; there is probably a simpler way of saying this. My mother admitted that he was no real kin to us, and we had neither of us ever met him. But when he came to London on a business trip that year and suggested calling on us, we agreed in advance to address him as 'Cousin Alexander'. I was unwilling to do so. I then believed that every man over forty should be called 'Sir', to keep him in his place and at his proper distance.

Mr Lancaster struck the wrong note, as far as I was concerned, right from the start. (I now realize that he must have been horribly nervous.) He addressed *me* as 'Kristophóros', giving the word a kind of classical pronunciation. I found his jocular manner patronizing and insolently familiar. He treated me like a schoolboy, I thought. His invitation was delivered in the form of a challenge. 'I'm willing to wager, my good Kristophóros, that you've never seen the inside of a tramp steamer? No? Then let me counsel you, for the salvation of your immortal soul, let go of your Lady Mother's apron-strings for once, and come over to see me on one of the Company's boats. Show us you can rough it. Let's see you eat bacon fat in the middle of a nor'easter, and have to run for the rail while the old salts laugh. It might just possibly make a man of you.'

'I'll be delighted to come,' I said, just as nonchalantly as I knew how.

I said it because, at that moment, I loathed Mr Lancaster and therefore couldn't possibly refuse his challenge. I said it because, at that age, I would have gone anywhere with anyone; I was wild with longing for the whole unvisited world. I said it also because I suspected Mr Lancaster was bluffing.

I was wrong. About three weeks later, a letter came for me from

the London offices of his Company. It informed me, as a matter already settled, that I should be sailing on such and such a day, on board the Company's freighter *Coriolanus*. An employee would be sent to guide me to the ship, if I would meet him at noon outside the dock-gates in the West India Dock Road.

Just for a moment, I was disconcerted. But then my fantasy took the situation over. I started to play the lead in an epic drama of the sea. For example, when a girl phoned and asked me if I could come to a cocktail party a week from Wednesday, I replied tersely, with a hint of grimness: 'Afraid not. Shan't be here.'

'Oh, really? Where will you be?'

'Don't know exactly. Somewhere in the middle of the North Sea. On a tramp steamer.'

The girl gasped.

Mr Lancaster had no part whatsoever in my epic. In fact, he was its one blemish. It was tiresome to have to admit that I was only going as far as the north coast of Germany. When speaking to people who didn't know me well, I contrived to suggest that this would be merely the first port of call on an immense and mysterious voyage.

The Company's employee, a clerk scarcely older than I, named Hicks, met me at the dock-gates as arranged. He was not a character I would have chosen for my epic, being spotty-skinned and wan from the sooty glooms and fogs of Fenchurch Street. Also, he was in a fussy hurry, which epic characters never are. 'Whew!' he exclaimed, glancing at his watch, 'we'd better look smart!' He seized hold of the handle of my suitcase and broke into a trot. Since I wouldn't let go and leave him to carry it alone, I had to trot, too. My entrance upon Act One of the drama was lacking in style.

Nevertheless, the panting young man who trotted at Hicks's side, with the suitcase banging in between them, was still conscious of his epic stature. For he nursed an amazing secret. The very day before this, my first novel, *All the Conspirators*, had been published. And nobody within miles of me knew about it! Neither Hicks, nor any of the people in that dockyard, nor the crew of the *Coriolanus*. Mr Lancaster didn't know, either; I had decided that he was utterly unworthy of being told. In fact, he would probably never find out; unless—but I was superstitiously unwilling to even consider *that* possibility. It was a possibility, of course. None of the reviews were out, yet. Just the same, I think I already felt, intuitively, that the book wasn't going to be a success. So I preferred my epic story to the facts of life; and I was telling it to myself at that moment: 'The

ay after *All the Conspirators* appeared—the day after that event which, unheralded and unsuspected at the time, was to mark the beginning of modern literature as we now know it—it was found that Isherwood was no longer in London. He had vanished, without trace or a word. His closest friends were bewildered and dismayed. There were even fears of his suicide. Then—months later—strange rumours were whispered around the cafés—of how, on that same morning, a muffled figure had been glimpsed, boarding a tramp steamer from a dock on the Isle of Dogs . . .

‘There she is,’ said Hicks. ‘That’s her.’

The *Coriolanus* was even smaller and dirtier-looking than I had expected. The parts of her that weren’t black were of a yellowish brown; the same colour, I thought—though this may have been merely association of ideas—as vomit. Two cranes were still dangling crates over her deck, which was swarming with dock-hands. They were shouting at the top of their voices, to make themselves heard above the rattle of winches and the squawking of the seagulls that circled overhead.

‘But we needn’t have hurried!’ I said reproachfully to Hicks. He answered indifferently that Captain Dobson liked passengers to be on board in plenty of time. He had lost interest in me already. With a mumbled goodbye, he left me at the gangplank, like a parcel he had delivered and for which he felt no further responsibility.

I elbowed my way aboard, nearly getting myself pushed into the open hold. Captain Dobson saw me from the bridge and came down to greet me. He was a small fattish man with a weatherscarlet face and the pouched bulging eyes of a comedian.

‘You’re going to be sick, you know,’ he said. ‘We’ve had some good men here, but they all failed.’ I tried to look suitably anxious.

Below decks, I found a Chinese cook, a Welsh cabin-boy and a steward who looked like a jockey. He had been on the Cunard Line for twelve years, he told me, but liked this better. ‘You’re on your own, here.’ He showed me my cabin. It was as tiny as a cupboard and quite airless; the porthole wouldn’t unscrew. I went into the saloon, but its long table was occupied by half a dozen clerks, scribbling frantically at cargo-lists. I climbed back up on deck again and found a place in the bows where, by making myself very small, I stayed out of everybody’s way.

An hour later, we sailed. It took a long time getting out of the dock into the river, for we had to pass through lock-gates. Lively slum-children hung on them, watching us. One of the cargo-clerks came and stood beside me at the rail.

‘You’ll have it choppy,’ he said. ‘She’s a regular dancing-master.’

And, without another word, he vaulted athletically over the railing on to the already receding wharf, waved briefly to me, and was gone. I felt deserted.

Then we had high tea in the saloon. I made the acquaintance of the Mate and the two Engineers. We ate soused mackerel and drank the tea out of mugs; it was brassily strong. I went back on deck, to find that a quiet cloudy evening had set in. We were leaving the city behind us. The docks and the warehouses gave way to cold grey fields and marshes. We passed several lightships. The last of them was called Barrow Deep. I felt like Conrad's Marlow, setting forth on some tropical adventure, or his Lord Jim, leaving England forever on his way to romantic disgrace and death. Captain Dobsorn passed me and said: 'This is the first stage of our daring voyage.' In his own way, he was trying to create an epic atmosphere. Perhaps Mr Lancaster had told him to give me a thrill. All right—I awarded him marks for effort.

Back to my cabin, for it was now too dark to see anything. The Steward looked in. He had come to propose that I should pay him a pound for my food during the voyage, and eat as much as I liked. I could see he thought this was a stiff bargain, because he was sure I'd be seasick. 'There was another gentleman with us, a couple of months ago,' he told me with relish. 'He was taken very badly. You'll knock on the wall if you want anything in the night, won't you, Sir?'

I smiled to myself, after he had left. For I had a second secret which I intended to guard as closely as my other. These seafolk were really quite endearingly simple, I thought. They appeared to be absolutely ignorant of the advances of medical science. Naturally, I had taken my precautions. In my pocket was a small cardboard box with capsules in it, wrapped in silver paper. The capsules contained either pink powders or grey powders. You had to take one of each; once before sailing, and thereafter twice a day. They were absolutely foolproof.

When I woke next morning, the ship was rolling powerfully. Between rolls, she thrust her bows steeply into the air, staggered slightly, fell forward with a crash that shook everything in the cabin. I had just finished swallowing my capsules when the door opened and the Steward looked in. I knew from the disappointment in his face what it was he'd been hoping to see.

'I thought you wasn't feeling well, Sir,' he said reproachfully. 'I looked in half an hour ago, and you lay there and didn't say a word.'

'I was asleep,' I said. 'I slept like a log.' And I gave this vulture a beaming smile.

At breakfast, the Second Engineer had his arm in a sling. A pipe had burst in the engines during the night, and he had scalded his hand. Teddy, the Welsh cabin-boy, cut up his bacon for him. Teddy was clumsy in doing this, and the Second Engineer told him sharply to hurry. For this, the Second Engineer was reproved by the First Engineer: 'You won't half be a bloody old bugger when you're older—my God you will!'

Despite the Second Engineer's semi-heroic injury, I was beginning to lose my sense of the epic quality of this voyage. I had expected to find that the crew of this ship belonged to a race of beings apart; men who lived only for the sea. But, as a matter of fact, none of them quite corresponded to my idea of a seaman. The Mate was too handsome; rather like an actor. The Engineers might just as well have been working in a factory; they were simply engineers. The Steward was like any other kind of professional servant. Captain Dobson wouldn't have looked out of place as the owner of a pub. I had to face the prosaic truth: all kinds of people go to sea.

Actually, their thoughts seemed entirely ashore. They talked about films they had seen. They discussed a recent scandalous divorce-case: 'She's what you might call a respectable whore.' They entertained me by asking riddles: 'What is it that a girl of fourteen hasn't got, a girl of sixteen is expecting, and Princess Mary never will get?' Answer: 'An insurance card.' I told the story about the clergyman, the drunk and the waifs and strays. When I got to the payoff line: 'If you wore your trousers the same way round as your collar . . .,' I faltered, not sure that it would be good taste to mimic a Cockney accent, since both Engineers had one. However, the story went over quite well. They were all very friendly. But the answer to that constantly-repeated young man's question, 'what do you really think of me?' seemed to be, as usual, 'they don't'. They weren't even sufficiently interested in me to be surprised when I took a second helping of bacon, although the ship was going up and down like a seesaw.

All day long, we lurched and slithered through the rugged sea. On deck the sea-glitter was so brilliant that I felt half stupified by it. Now that everything was battened down and squared away, the ship seemed to have grown to twice its original size. I walked the empty deck like a prize turkey. Now and then, Captain Dobson, who stood benevolently on the bridge smoking a briar pipe and wearing an old felt hat, pointed out passing ships to me. Whenever he did this, I felt bound to hurry to the rail and scrutinize them

with professional intentness. Later, he embarrassed me by bringing me a deck chair, and setting it up with his own hands. 'Now you'll be as happy as the boy who killed his father,' he said. And he added, 'I'd like your opinion of this,' as he gave me a paper-bound book with a sexy picture on the cover. It was called 'The Bride of the Brute', and contained a lot of scenes like: 'He cupped her ripe breasts in his burning hands, then savagely crushed them together till she cried out in pain and desire.' Captain Dobson took it as a compliment that I read right through the book in an hour. Meanwhile, Teddy served me mugs of tea with large jam puffs.

In the middle of the night I woke, just as if somebody had roused me. Kneeling on my bunk, I peered out through the porthole. And there were the first lights of Germany shining across the black water, blue and green and red.

Next morning, we steamed up the river. Captain Dobson drank with the German pilot in the chart-room and became very cheerful. He had exchanged his old felt hat for a smart white cap, which made him look more than ever like a comic music-hall sea-dog. We passed barges which were as snug as homes, with gay curtained windows and pots of flowers. Captain Dobson showed me various places of interest along the shore. Pointing to one factory building, he said: 'They've got hundreds of girls in there, cleaning the wool. It's so hot, they strip to the waist.' He winked. I leered politely.

In the harbour, the *Coriolanus* became tiny again, as she made her way humbly to her berth amidst all the great ships. Captain Dobson shouted greetings to them as we passed, and was greeted in return. He appeared to be universally popular.

When we tied up, our deck was so far below the level of the dock that the gang plank had to be nearly vertical. A police officer, who had come to inspect my passport, hesitated to descend it. Captain Dobson mocked him: 'Go 'vay, Tirpitz; Go 'vay!' He had called the Pilot 'Tirpitz', too, and all the captains of the ships he had hailed. The police officer climbed down cautiously backwards, laughing but holding on very tight.

After the stamping of my passport, there were no other formalities. I shook hands with the Steward (who was sulking a little; a bad loser), tipped Teddy and waved goodbye to Captain Dobson. 'Give my love to the girls!' he shouted from the bridge. The police officer obligingly came with me to the dock-gates and put me on a tram which stopped outside Mr Lancaster's office.

It was an impressive place, even larger than I'd expected, on the ground floor, with revolving glass doors. Half a dozen girls and

about twice that many men were at work there. A youth of sixteen ushered me into Mr Lancaster's private room.

I had remembered Mr Lancaster as tall; but I had forgotten how very, very tall he was. How tall and how thin. Obeying the strong subconscious physical reaction which is part of every meeting, I defensively became a fraction of a millimeter shorter, broader, more compact, as I shook his bony hand.

'Well, Cousin Alexander, here I am!'

'Christopher,' he said, in his deep languid voice. It was a statement, not an exclamation. I expanded it to mean: here you are and it doesn't astonish me in the least.

His head was so small that it seemed feminine. He had very large ears, a broad wet moustache and a peevish mouth. He looked sulky, frigid, dyspeptic. His nose was long and red, with a suggestion of moisture at the end of it. And he wore a high, hard collar and awkward black boots. No—I could find no beauty in him. All my earlier impressions were confirmed. I reminded myself with approval of one of my friend Hugh Weston's dicta: 'All ugly people are wicked.'

'I shall be ready in exactly . . .' Mr Lancaster looked at his watch and seemed to make some rapid but complicated calculation, 'eighteen minutes.' He walked back to his desk.

I sat down on a hard chair in the corner and felt an indignant gloom fill me from my toes to my head. I was violently disappointed. Why? What had I expected? A warm welcome, questions about the voyage, admiration for my freedom from seasickness? Well . . . yes. I *had* expected that. And I had been a fool, I told myself. I should have known better. Now, here I was, trapped for a week with this frigid old ass.

(Looking back on the two of them—Mr Lancaster and myself—from the vantage-point of thirty years later, I see quite clearly that Mr Lancaster is showing off. Yes! With incredible, pathetic silliness, he actually is trying to impress me by his efficiency-act. It is largely subconscious, no doubt; but he is playing the kind of character he imagines a young man like myself would look up to. However, if Mr Lancaster's silliness is inexcusable, so is my intolerance. No . . . I have no patience with either of them, at this moment.)

Mr Lancaster had begun to write something. Without looking up, he took a newspaper from the desk and tossed it over to me. It was a *London Times*, three days old.

'Thank you . . . Sir,' I said, as spitefully as I dared. It was my declaration of war. Mr Lancaster didn't react in any way.

Then he began to telephone. He telephoned in English, French,

German and Spanish. All these languages he spoke in exactly the same tone and with the same inflections. Every now and then he boomed, and I realized that he was listening to his own voice and liking the way it sounded. It was noticeably ecclesiastical and it also had something of the government minister in it; nothing of the business man. Several times he became commanding. Once he was almost gracious. He couldn't keep his hands still for a moment and the least problem made him irritable and excited.

He wasn't ready for more than half an hour.

Then, without warning, he rose, said 'that's all', and walked out, leaving me to follow. All of the adult employees had left the outer office, presumably to get their lunch. Only the youth was on duty. Mr Lancaster said something to him in German, from which I learned only that his name was Waldemar. As we went out, I grinned at him, trying instinctively to draw him into a little conspiracy against Mr Lancaster. But he remained expressionless, and merely made me a small stiff German bow. It really shocked me, to see an adolescent boy bow like that. Mr Lancaster certainly broke them in young. Or did he . . . horrible thought! . . . class me with Mr Lancaster and therefore treat me with the same mocking-contemptuous respect? I thought not. Waldemar was probably every bit as stuffy as his employer, and tried to imitate his behaviour as a model of gentlemanly deportment.

We took a tram back to Mr Lancaster's home. It was a warm, humid day of Spring. Carrying my suitcase and wearing—in order to transport it—my overcoat, made me sweat pints; but I enjoyed the weather. It disturbed and excited me. I was glad that the tram was crowded—not only because I thus became separated from Mr Lancaster and didn't have to make conversation with him, but also because I was pressed up close against the bodies of young Germans of my own age, boys and girls; and the nationality-barrier between them and me seemed to rub off, as the swaying car swung us into a tight-packed huddle. Outside, there were more young people, on bicycles. The schoolboys wore caps with shiny peaks and bright-coloured shirts with laces instead of buttons, open at the neck. The gaily-painted tram sped clanking and tolling its bell down long streets of white houses, where broad creeper-leaves shadowed fronts of embossed stucco, in gardens dense with lilac. We passed a fountain; a sculptured group of Laocoön and his sons writhing in the grip of the snakes. In this sunshine, you could almost envy them. For the snakes were vomiting cool water over the hot, naked bodies of the men; and their deadly wrestling-match appeared lazy and sensual.

Mr Lancaster lived in the ground floor flat of a large house that faced north. Its rooms were high, ugly and airy. They had big white sliding doors which shot open at a touch, with uncanny momentum, making a bang which resounded through the building. The place was furnished in Germanic *art nouveau* style. The chairs, tables, cupboards and bookcases were grim angular shapes which seemed to express a hatred of comfort and an inflexible puritanism. An equally grim stencilled frieze of leafless branches ran around the walls of the living-room; and the hanging centre-lamp was an austere sour-green glass lotus bud. The place must have been dreary beyond words in winter; now at least it had the merit of being cool. Mr Lancaster's only obvious contribution to the *décor* were a few school and regimental group photographs.

The most arresting of Mr Lancaster's photographs was a large one, showing a vigorous, bearded old man of perhaps seventy-five. What a beard! It was the real article, no longer obtainable, made of sterling silver; the beard of the genuine Victorian paterfamilias. It foamed in torrents from his finely-arched nostrils and his big-lobed ears, foamed over his cheeks in two tidal waves that collided below his chin to form boiling rapids in which no boat could have lived. What a beard-conscious old beauty—tilting his head up to be admired, with an air of self-indulged caprice!

'My dear old Father,' said Mr Lancaster, making it clear, by his memorial tone of voice, that The Beard was now with God. 'Before he was sixteen, he had rounded the Horn and been north of the Aleutians, right up to the edge of the ice. By the time he was your age, Christopher' (this was a faint reproach), 'he was Second Mate, sailing out of Singapore on the China Seas run. He used to translate Xenophon during the typhoons. Taught me everything I know.'

Lunch was cold. It consisted of black bread, hard yellow Dutch cheese and various kinds of sausage—the indecently pink kind, the kind that smells gamy, the kind full of lumps of gristle, the kind that looks in cross-section like a very old stained glass window in a church.

Before we had eaten anything, Mr Lancaster informed me that he didn't approve of after-dinner naps. 'When I was managing the Company's office at Valparaiso, my second-in-command was always telling me I ought to take a siesta, like the rest of them did. So I said to him: "That's the time when the white man steals a march on the dagoes".'

This, I was to discover, was a characteristic specimen of Mr Lancaster's line of bold reactionary talk. No doubt, in my case, he was using it for largely educational reasons; taking it for granted

that I must have romantic liberal views which needed a counterbalance. There he was both right and wrong. I did have liberal views, in a vague unthoughtout way; but he was quite wrong in thinking that by expressing opposite opinions he could startle me. I should have been startled only if he had agreed with me; as it was, I accepted his prejudices as a matter of course, without curiosity, finding them entirely in character.

Actually, I think, Mr Lancaster felt himself to be beyond left or right. He took his stand on the infallibility of his experience, and his weary knowledge that he had seen everything worth seeing. He was also beyond literature. He told me that he spent his evenings carpentering in a small workshop at the back of the flat: 'to keep myself from reading'.

'I've got no use for books as books,' he announced. 'When I've taken what I need out of them, I throw them away. . . . Whenever anyone comes and tells me about some philosophy that's just been discovered, some new idea that's going to change the world, I turn to the Classics and see which of the great Greeks expressed it best. . . . Scribbling, in these latter days, is nothing but a nervous disease. And it's spreading everywhere. I don't doubt, my poor Kristophóros, that before long you'll have sunk so low as to commit a novel, yourself!'

'I've just published one.'

The moment I had spoken, I was horrified and ashamed. Not until the words were in my mouth had I known what I was going to say. Mr Lancaster couldn't have provoked me more artfully into a confession if he'd been a prosecuting lawyer.

The most humiliating aspect of my confession was that it didn't seem to surprise or interest him in the least. 'Send me a copy sometime,' he told me blandly: 'I'll let you have it back by return post, with all the split infinitives underlined in red pencil and all the *non sequiturs* in blue.' He patted my shoulder; I winced with dislike. 'Oh, by the way,' he added, 'we have a trifling foolish banquet towards . . .' (he spoke this line in a special, whimsical tone, as if to draw my respectful attention to the fact that here was a quotation from the Divine Swan, in playful mood). 'All the local worthies from the shipping companies, the consulates and so forth, will be there. I've arranged for you to come.'

'No,' I said. And I meant it. I had had enough. There was a limit to the amount of my valuable life I could afford to waste on this ignorant, offensive, self-satisfied fool. I would simply walk out on him, at once, this very afternoon. I had some money. I'd go to a travel-bureau and find out how much it would cost to get back to

England third class, by the ordinary civilized means. If I hadn't though, I would take a room in a hotel and telegraph my mother or more. It was perfectly easy. Mr Lancaster wasn't dictator of the world, and there was nothing he could do to stop me. He knew this as well as I did. I wasn't a child. And yet—

And yet—for some absurd, irrational, infuriating, humiliating reason—I was afraid of him! Incredible, but true. So afraid, that my defiance made me tremble and my voice turned weak. Mr Lancaster didn't appear to have heard me.

'It'll be an experience for you,' he said, munching his hard old cheese.

'I can't.' This time I spoke much too loudly, because of over-compensation.

'Can't what?'

'Can't come.'

'Why not?' His manner was quite indulgent; an adult listening to the excuses of a schoolboy.

'I—I haven't got a dinner jacket.' Again, I horrified myself. This betrayal was as involuntary as the other; and, up to the moment of speaking, I'd supposed I was going to tell him I was leaving.

'I didn't expect you would have one,' said Mr Lancaster, imper-turbably. 'I've already asked my second-in-command to lend you his. He's about your size, and he has to stay at home tonight. His wife's expecting another baby. Her fifth. They breed like vermin. That's the real menace of the future, Christopher. Not war. Not disease. Starvation. They'll spawn themselves to death. I warned them, back in '21. Wrote a long letter to *The Times*, forecasting the curve of the birth-rate. I've been proved right already. But they were afraid. The facts were too terrible. They only printed my first paragraph—.' He rose abruptly to his feet: 'You can go out and look around town. Be back here at six, sharp. No—better say five fifty-five. I have to work now.' And with that, he left me alone.

The banquet was held in some private rooms above a big restaurant in the middle of the city.

As soon as we arrived, Mr Lancaster's manner became preoccupied. He glanced rapidly away from me in all directions and kept leaving me to go over and speak to groups of guests as they arrived. He wore a greenish-black dinner jacket of pre-1914 cut and carried a white silk handkerchief inside his starched cuff. My own borrowed dinner jacket was definitely too large for me; I felt like an amateur conjurer—but one without any rabbits to produce out of his big pockets.

Mr Lancaster was nervous! He evidently felt a need to explain to me what was worrying him, but he couldn't. He couldn't say anything coherent. He muttered broken sentences, while his eyes wandered around the room:

'You see—this annual meeting. A formality, usually. But this year—certain influences—absolute firmness—make them see clearly what's at stake. Because the alternative is. Same thing everywhere today. Got to be fought. Uncompromisingly. State my position—once and for all. We shall see. I don't quite think they'll dare to—'

Evidently this meeting, whatever it was, would take place as of once. For already the guests were moving toward a door at the other end of the room. Without even telling me to wait for him, Mr Lancaster followed them. I had no alternative but to stay where I was sitting at the extreme end of one of the settees.

And now, I had a very strange experience—a psychic experiences I suppose one could call it. I have been through a similar condition but only half a dozen times, perhaps, in the course of my life. It was a kind of psychic hyperesthesia; a condition in which I suffered, with extraordinary and indeed ridiculous intensity, all the sufferings of being young.

Today, I can remember these sufferings most clearly. No—more than that—I can relive them. There are many such invisible doors into one's past. For example, I can relive my feelings when, aged nine, I had by sheer luck shot a goal in a football game, at my first school. In both these cases, the door into the past is the same—a mirror. I looked into a mirror in the changing-room when I returned from that school football field, because I was actually curious to see if this unexpected athletic success had somehow changed my appearance! (It hadn't.) And I looked into a mirror in that restaurant because I didn't dare look anywhere else—lest I should catch somebody's eye.

So I don't have to remember—I can see myself in that mirror in May 1928, and I can *feel* how I felt. The experience is, of course, still to some extent bi-focal, because my sense of being myself at this present time and at my present age never quite leaves me. Nevertheless, I'm able to get a genuinely subjective recall of the moment.

I see that face in the mirror regarding me with large, reproachful eyes, from beneath a cowlick of streaky blond hair. A thin, strained face, quite foreign to my rather jowly middle-aged face of today. Indeed, it is so touchingly pretty that it might have been photographed and blown up big for a poster appealing on behalf of the World's Young: 'The Old hate us because we're so cute. Won't you help?'

And now I experience what that face is experiencing—the sense which the Young so constantly have, of being deserted. Their god forsakes them many times a day; they are continually crying out in despair from their crosses. It isn't that I feel angry with Mr Lancaster for having deserted me; I hardly blame him at all. For he seems to me to be an almost impersonal expression, at this moment, of the world's betrayal of the Young.

Next, I experience the terrible, gnawing fear which this desertion causes; and I understand its reason. (Maybe, however, this is my middle-aged self interpreting; I couldn't have analysed myself like that, at the time.) The Young are frightened when they are deserted because they have a terror of losing their identity, or of discovering that they don't have any identity to lose. The way in which they might possibly discover this awful fact is—they think—by being challenged. Suppose an older person were to come up and ask 'who are you?'—and then, unimpressed by your faltering reply, were to snap 'prove it!'—and then, upon your failing to do so, were to turn away with the annihilating words 'I don't believe you'—then—why, then—you'd be lost indeed! (If only one could convince the Young that they have nothing to worry about: they are very much better off without this identity; but, if they don't have one yet, they will grow one in the course of nature, as surely as a potato. Furthermore, it is this identity they so yearn for that will ultimately drag them down into their spiritual graves, even as their bodies will drag them into their physical graves. . . . Are the Young going to believe that? Of course not!)

On this particular occasion, I find myself in mortal dread of being challenged by the manager of the restaurant or by any one of the various waiters who are hanging around the room, waiting for the banquet to begin. Suppose they ask me what I'm doing here—why, if I'm a bona fide dinner guest, I'm not with the others attending the meeting?

Therefore I concentrate all my will upon the desired condition of not being accosted. Fixing my eyes upon my reflection in the mirror, I try to exclude these men utterly from my consciousness, to eradicate every vestige of a possible telepathic bond between us. It is a tremendous strain. I tremble all over and feel sick to my stomach. Sweat runs down my temples.

(Looking back, it amuses me to believe that I succeeded one hundred per cent; that I became physically invisible. Perhaps this is the way in which we are sometimes endowed with psychic powers, so that we are hardly aware of them. Of course, it is obvious that an adept would learn to exercise such powers with far less

exertion; otherwise, they would be useless. I know that if I had stood up and walked around while continuing my efforts, I should either have become visible again or fainted from exhaustion. As it was, I stayed on that settee without once changing my position, stretching my legs or turning my head, until the meeting was over. (It lasted nearly an hour and a half.)

The guests returned mostly by twos and threes, but Mr Lancaster was alone. He came straight over to me.

'We've got to eat now,' he told me, with an air of nervous impatience, just as though I had raised some objection. 'I've had them put you next to old Machado. He'll tell you all about Peru. He's their vice-consul here. You speak French, I suppose?'

'Not one word.' This was quite untrue. But I wanted to disconcert Mr Lancaster, and so punish him a little for leaving me alone by making him feel guilty.

But he wasn't even listening. 'Good. It'll be an experience for you.' And he was off again. I joined the crowd that was now moving into the dining-room.

It was a very big place, a real banqueting-hall. There were four long tables in it. What was evidently the table of honour was placed along the far wall, under an arrangement of many national flags. At this table, I saw Mr Lancaster already in the act of sitting down. It was equally easy to identify the least important table, right by the door. And, sure enough, one of its place-cards had my name on it. On my right, I read the name of Emilio Machado; and, a moment later, Sr Machado himself took his seat at my side. He was a tiny man in his seventies. He had a benevolent mahogany-brown face netted with wrinkles—these were a slightly paler shade of brown—and hung with a drooping white moustache. His lips moved in a rather pathetic, silly smile as he watched the expressions on the faces of some loudly-chattering guests across the table; but I didn't have the impression that he wanted to be spoken to.

The dinner, rather to my surprise, was excellent. (I associated everything in this city so completely with Mr Lancaster that I was apt to forget he couldn't possibly have had anything to do with the catering.) As soon as the soup course was over, the guests began to toast each other, pair by pair. To do this, a guest would half rise to his feet, glass in hand, and wait until he had succeeded in catching the desired eye. The other guest, when caught, would also rise, glasses would be raised, bows exchanged. It was obvious that this was a serious matter. I felt sure that no toast went unremembered and that to omit any of them would lead to grave consequences in

our subsequent business dealings.

Watching all this toasting made me aware that I myself had nothing to drink. It appeared that the drinks didn't come with the dinner; they had to be ordered separately. In the fuss of changing my clothes, I had forgotten my money; I would have to send the bill over to Mr Lancaster to be paid. But this didn't bother me. Serve him right, I thought, for his neglect. I made up my mind to speak to Mr Machado, and ask him to share a bottle of wine with me. He didn't have any, either. I drew a deep breath: 'Si vous voulez, Monsieur, j'aimerais bien boire quelque chose—'

He didn't hear me. Once again, my miserable voice—which nowadays carries without effort to the remotest corners of even the biggest lecture-halls—had betrayed me. I felt my face getting hot with shame. But now I heard a voice in my other ear: 'You are the nephew of Mr Lancaster, yes?'

I started guiltily. For I had been so absorbed in the problem of communicating with Machado that I'd scarcely noticed my other neighbour. He was a smiling greedy-faced man, with a gleam in his eye and no chin. His sleek thin grey hair was brushed immaculately back from his forehead. An unused monocle hung down on a broad silk ribbon against his shirt-front. His mouth pulled down at the corners, giving him a slight resemblance to a shark—but not a very dangerous one; not a man-eater, certainly. Squinting at his placard, I read a Hungarian name which no one but a Hungarian could possibly pronounce.

'I'm not his nephew,' I said. 'I'm not related to him at all, as a matter of fact.'

'You are not?' This delighted the Shark. 'You are just friends?'

'I suppose that's what you call it.'

'A friend?' He rolled the 'r' lusciously: 'Mr Lancaster has a yorng friend!'

I grinned. Already I felt that I knew the Shark very well indeed.

'But he leaves you alone, no? That is not so very friendly.'

'Well, now I've got you to look after me.' (Did I *really* say that? Yes—I know I did, because I can hear the tone in which I said it; falsely gay, with a faint note of hysteria. It is the voice of Youth in desperation; clutching at any means of amusement, because amusement is a protection from self-consciousness. Oh, the shame of the flirty little voice! And the depressing thing is, I have heard that voice quite often in recent years—talking to *me*!)

Anyhow, my reply sent the Shark off into peals of screaming laughter. (On second thoughts, he was also partly a parrot.)

'I look after you, yes?' said Parrot-Shark: 'Oh, very good! I shall

look after you. Do not be afraid of that, please. I shall do it.' He beckoned to a waiter. 'You will help me drink one great big bottle of wine, yes? Very bad for me, if I must every time drink up all alone.'

'Very bad.'

'And now tell me, please—you are the friend of Mr Lancaster since how long?'

'Since this morning.'

'This morning, only!' This didn't really shock Parrot-Shark, as he pretended; but it did puzzle him sincerely. 'And he leaves you alone already?'

'Oh, I'm used to that!'

He was looking at me much more inquisitively now; aware, perhaps, that here was something not quite kosher, just a bit uncanny, even. At least, that was what I liked to think. And was I so far wrong? I really was quite a strange creature—far stranger, certainly, than I am today. Parrot-Shark must have sensed this. He was trying to look into my eyes; and I wasn't going to let him. Because, if I did, he would see some hint of the games I was playing, the roles I was acting; he would get a glimpse of the wriggling ego-thing that kept changing its form nervously lest it should be known. Maybe if he could have seen what a very odd young fish he had at the end of his line, he would have fled screaming from the room. However, at this moment the wine arrived, and soon his curiosity was forgotten.

From then on, dinner became quite painless. It was easy enough to keep Parrot-Shark amused, especially after we had finished the first bottle and he had ordered another. At the end of the meal, the lights were turned out and the waiters brought in ice-puddings with coloured lamps inside them. Then the speeches began. A fat, bald man rose to his feet with the assurance of a celebrity. Parrot-Shark whispered to me that this was the Mayor. The Mayor told stories. Someone had once explained to me the technique of story-telling in German: you reserve, if possible, the whole point of the story and pack it into the final verb at the end of the last sentence. When you reach this sentence, you pause dramatically, then you cast forth the heavy, clumsy polysyllabic verb, like dice-thrower, upon the table.

At the end of each story the audience roared, and wiped perspiring faces with their handkerchiefs. But, by the time it was Mr Lancaster's turn to speak, they were getting tired and not so easy to please. His speech was followed by applause that was no more than barely polite.

'Mr Lancaster is in bad humour tonight,' Parrot-Shark told me, with evident sly satisfaction.

'Why is he in a bad humour?'

'Here we have a Club, for the foreign people who have work in this city. Mr Lancaster is the President of our Club for three years, now. Always before, he is elected with no opposition—because he represents so powerful a shipping firm—'

'And, this year, you elected someone else?'

'Oh no, we elect him. But only after much discussion. We elect him because we are afraid of him.'

'Ha, ha, that's very funny!'

'It is true! We are all afraid of Mr Lancaster. He is our school-master. No—do not tell him that, please! I joke only.'

'I'm not afraid of him,' I boasted.

'Ah, for you it is different! You are also English. I think when you are Mr Lancaster's age, people will be afraid of *you*.' But Parrot-Shark did not mean this; he didn't believe it for one instant. He patted my hand. 'I like every time to tease you a little bit, no?' On this understanding we drank each other's healths and finished a third bottle.

The rest of the evening I remember only rather vaguely. After the speeches, the whole company rose. Some, I suppose, went home. The majority got possession of chairs in the outer room, where they ordered more drinks. Little tables appeared from somewhere to put the drinks on. Those who had nowhere to sit wandered about, on the alert to capture an empty place. The lights seemed very bright. The tremendous clatter of conversation tuned itself down in my ears into a deep, drowsy hum. I was sitting at a table in an alcove. Parrot-Shark was still looking after me, and several of his friends had joined him. I don't think they were all Hungarians—indeed, none of them seemed obviously French and another Scandinavian—but they had the air of belonging together. It was as if they were all members of a secret society, and their talk was full of passwords and smilingly acknowledged countersigns. I felt intuitively that they had all been involved in the opposition to Mr Lancaster's re-election. They didn't seem very formidable; it was no wonder that he had defeated them. But they were more dangerous and more determined, perhaps, than they looked. They were smiling enemies, snipers, heel-biters; quick to scurry away, but sure to return.

Machado had long since disappeared. But I kept getting glimpses of Mr Lancaster. I was surprised to realize that he was every bit as drunk as I was. I had supposed he would be extremely abstinent, either from conviction or caution; or else that he would have a very

strong head. We were drinking liqueur brandy, now; I had begun to loll on the table. 'Feeling sleepy?' Parrot-Shark asked. 'I fix you up, eh?' He called the waiter and gave a detailed order in German, winking at his friends as he did so. They all laughed. I laughed too. Really and truly, I didn't care what they did with me.

The waiter brought the drink. I sniffed at it. 'What is it?' I asked. 'Just a small special medicine, yes?' The faces of Parrot-Shark and his fellow-conspirators had moved in very close, now. They formed a circle within which I felt myself hypnotically enclosed. Their eyes followed my every movement with an intentness which pleased and flattered me. It was certainly a change, being at the burning-point of such focused attention. I sniffed the drink again. It was some kind of a cocktail; but I could distinguish only a musky odour which perhaps contained cloves.

But now something made me turn my head. And there was Mr Lancaster. My sense of distance had become a bit tricky; he appeared to be about twenty-five yards away and at least twelve feet tall. Actually, he must have been standing right behind my chair. He said sharply: 'Don't drink that stuff, Christopher. It's a plot— (Or perhaps: 'It's a lot'; I can't be sure.)

There was a long pause during which, I suppose, I grinned idiotically. Parrot-Shark said, smiling: 'You hear what Herr Lancaster says? You are not to drink it.'

'No,' I said, 'I certainly won't. I won't disoblige my dearest Coz. With these words, I raised the glass to my lips and drained the entire drink. It was like swallowing a sky-rocket. The shock made me quite sober for a moment. 'That's very interesting,' I heard myself saying: 'Pure reflex action. I mean—you see—if he'd told me not to drink it—I mean, I shouldn't—'

My voice trailed off and I just could not be bothered to say any more. Looking up, I was surprised to find that Mr Lancaster was no longer there. Probably several minutes had gone by.

'He doesn't like you,' I abruptly told Parrot-Shark.

Parrot-Shark grinned: 'It is because he is afraid that I steal you from him, no?'

'Well, what are you waiting for?' I asked aggressively. 'Don't you want to steal me?'

'We shall steal you,' said Parrot-Shark, but he kept glancing apprehensively toward Mr Lancaster, who had reappeared in the middle distance. 'There is a bar,' he whispered to me, 'down by the harbour. It is very amusing.'

'What do you mean—amusing?'

'You will see.'

His words broke the spell. I was suddenly, catastrophically bored. His whole seduction—for I suppose you could call it that—was like an interminable and very badly written book which I now knew I did not have to read.

‘Amusing?’ I said. ‘Amusing?’

With that I rose, in all the dignity of my drunkenness, and walked slowly across to where Mr Lancaster was sitting. ‘Take me home,’ I told him, in a commanding voice. It must have been commanding, because he instantly obeyed!

The next morning, at breakfast, Mr Lancaster seemed very much under the weather. His poor nose was redder than ever and his face was grey. He sat listlessly at the table and let me get the food from the kitchen. I hummed to myself as I did so. I felt unusually cheerful. I was aware that Mr Lancaster was watching me.

‘I hope you take cold baths, Christopher?’

‘I took one this morning.’

‘Good boy! It’s one of the habits you can judge a man by.’

I wanted to laugh out loud. Because I never took a cold bath unless I had been drunk, and would indeed have thought it shameful and reactionary to take one for any other reason. I agreed with Mr Lancaster, for once: cold-bath-taking was a habit you could judge a man by—it marked him as one of the Enemy. Nevertheless—I had to confess that part of myself, a spaniel side of me that I deplored, eagerly licked up Mr Lancaster’s misplaced praise!

Altogether, I felt a distinct improvement in our relations; at any rate, on my side. I felt that I had definitely scored over him and could therefore afford to be generous. I had defied him last night about drinking that drink; and had got away with it. I had had a glimpse behind the scenes of his business life and realized that he wasn’t quite invulnerable; he was at least subject to petty ambition. Best of all, he had a hangover this morning and I hadn’t—well, not much of one.

‘I’m afraid I was a little preoccupied, yesterday evening,’ he said. ‘I should have taken you aside and explained things to you quietly. It was a very delicate situation. I had to act quickly—’ I became aware that Mr Lancaster didn’t really want to tell me about the Club and his fight for re-election; it wouldn’t have sounded important enough. So he took refuge in grandiose generalizations: ‘There are evil things abroad in the world. I’ve been in Russia, and I know. I know Satanists when I see them. And they’re getting bolder every year. They no longer crawl the gutters. They sit in the seats of power. I’m going to make a prophecy—listen, I want you to

remember this—in ten years from now, this city will be a place you couldn't bring your mother, or your wife, or any pure woman to visit. It will be—I don't say worse, because that would be impossible—but as bad—as bad as Berlin!

'Is Berlin so bad?' I asked, trying not to sound too interested.

'Christopher—in the whole of the Thousand Nights and One Night, in the most shameful rituals of the Tantra, in the carvings of the Black Pagoda, in the Japanese brothel-pictures, in the vilest pictures of the oriental mind, you couldn't find anything more nauseating than what goes on there, quite openly, every day. This city is doomed, more surely than Sodom ever was. Those people don't even realize how low they have sunk. Evil doesn't know itself there. The most terrible of all devils rules—the Devil without a face. You've led a sheltered life, Christopher. Thank God for it. You could never imagine such things.'

'No—I'm sure I couldn't,' I said meekly. And then and there I made a decision—one that was to have a very important effect on the rest of my life. I decided that, no matter how, I would get to Berlin just as soon as ever I could and that I would stay there a long, long time.

That afternoon, Mr Lancaster arranged that Waldemar should take me to see the sights. We looked at the paintings in the Rathaus and visited the Cathedral. Captain Dobson had made me curious to see the Bleikeller, the Lead Cellar, under it, in which corpses of human beings and animals are preserved. Captain Dobson had described how he had been to see these corpses with his brother. 'One of them's a woman, you know. She's wearing a pair of black drawers. So I thought to myself, I'd like to see how things had panned out down there. There was a caretaker on guard, but he'd got his back turned to us. So I said to my brother, just keep an eye on old Tirpitz. And then I lifted them up. And, do you know, there was nothing—nothing at all! The rats must have been at her.'

The flesh of the corpses had shrivelled on their bones so that they were hardly more than skeletons; it looked like black rubber. There was a caretaker on this occasion, too; but he didn't turn his back and I had no chance of testing Captain Dobson's story. The thought of it made me smile; I wished I could tell it to Waldemar. An American lady who was down in the Cellar with us asked me how the corpses had been preserved. When I told her I didn't know she suggested I should ask Waldemar. I had to explain that I couldn't. Whereupon, she cried to her companion: 'Say—isn't this

te? This young gentleman can't speak any German and his friend
 esn't speak any English!
 I didn't think it was cute, at all. Being with Waldemar embarrassed
 e. He was probably a nice boy. He was certainly nice-looking; in
 ct, he was quite beautiful, in a high-cheekboned, Gothic style. He
 oked like one of the carved stone angels in the Cathedral. No doubt
 e twelfth century sculptor had used just such a boy—maybe a
 rect ancestor of Waldemar—for his model. But an angel isn't a
 ery thrilling companion, especially if he doesn't speak your lan-
 age; and Waldemar seemed so passive. He just followed me
 ound, without showing any initiative. My guess was that he
 ound me as tiresome as the sights, and only consoled himself by
 reflecting that it would be even more boring back in the office.

The four days which I now spent with Mr Lancaster seemed like
 whole life together. I doubt if I should have gotten to know him
 ny better in four months or four years.

I was bored, of course; but that didn't bother me particularly.
 Most of the Young are bored most of the time—if they have any
 spirit at all. That is to say, they are outraged—and quite rightly so
 —because Life isn't as wonderful as they feel it ought to be.

But I had decided to make the best of Mr Lancaster. I was
 ashamed of my adolescent reactions to him, that first day. Wasn't I
 a novelist? At college, my friend Allen Chalmers and I had been
 ond of exchanging the watchword 'All pains!' This was short for
 Matthew Arnold's line in his sonnet on Shakespeare: 'All pains the
 mmortal spirit must endure.' We used it to remind each other that,
 to a writer, everything is potential material and that he has no
 business quarrelling with his bread and butter. Mr Lancaster, I now
 reminded myself, was part of 'all pains', and I resolved to accept
 him and study him scientifically.

So the first time I found myself alone in his flat, I searched it
 carefully for clues. I felt ridiculously guilty, doing this. There were
 no rugs on the floors, and the noise of my footsteps was so loud that
 I was tempted to take off my shoes. In a corner of the living-room
 stood a pair of skis. They looked somehow so like Mr Lancaster
 that they might have been his familiars, watching me. Once, I made
 a face at them. I was being watched, anyway, by the photograph of
 The Beard. How dearly he would have liked to have me aboard his
 ship, to be ordered aloft in a blizzard off the Horn! When you looked
 at him and then considered his victim and pupil, Mr Lancaster,
 you realized how much the old monster had to answer for.

On the whole, my search was disappointing. I found almost

nothing. There was a locked writing-desk which might possibly contain secrets; I would watch for a chance to see inside it. Otherwise, all the drawers and cupboards were open. My only discovery of any interest was that Mr Lancaster kept a British Army captain's uniform in the wardrobe with his other clothes. So he was one of those dreary creatures who made a cult of their war experiences. Well, I might have known it. At least it was something to begin on.

At supper that night—our only eatable meal, since it was cooked by a woman who came in—I got him on to the subject. It certainly wasn't difficult. I barely had to mention the word War to start him intoning:

'Loos . . . Armentières . . . Ypres . . . St Quentin . . . Compiègne . . . Abbeville . . . Eprenay . . . Amiens . . . Bethune . . . St Omer . . . Arras . . .' His voice had gone into its ecclesiastical sing-song, and I had begun to wonder if he would ever stop. But he did, abruptly. Then, in a much lower voice, he said 'Le Cateau', and was silent for several moments. He had pronounced the name in his most specially 'sacred' tone. And now he explained: 'It was there that I wrote what I regret to say is one of the very few great lines of poetry on the War.' Again, his voice rose into a chant: 'Only the monstrous anger of the guns.'

'But surely,' I involuntarily exclaimed, 'that's by—' Then I quickly checked myself, as I realized the full beauty of this discovery. Mr Lancaster had genuine, serious delusions of grandeur!

'I could have been a writer,' he continued. 'I had that power which only the greatest writers have—the power of looking down on all human experience with absolute objectivity.' He said this with such conviction that there was something almost spooky about it. I was reminded of the way the dead talk about themselves in Dante.

'Tolstoy had it,' Mr Lancaster mused: 'But Tolstoy was dirty. I know, because I've lived in six countries. He couldn't look at a peasant girl without thinking of her breasts under her dress.' He paused, to let me recover from the shock of this powerful language. He was in the role of the great novelist now, talking simply and brutally of Life as he sees it, without fear or desire. 'Some day, Christopher, you must go there and see it for yourself. Those steppes stretching thousands of miles beyond the horizon, and all the squalor and the hopelessness. All the terrible rot of sloth. The utter lack of backbone. Then you'll know why Russia is being run today by a pack of atheist Jews. . . . We in England never produced anyone greater than Keats. Keats was a clean-hearted lad, but he couldn't see clearly. He was too sick. You have to have a healthy mind in a healthy body. Oh, I know you young Freudians sneer at

ach things, but History will prove you wrong. Your generation will pay and pay and pay. The sun's touching the horizon already. It's almost too late. The night of the barbarian is coming on. I could have written all that. I could have warned them. But I'm a man of action, really—

'I'll tell you what, most excellent Kristophóros—I'm going to make you a present. I'll give you the idea for a book of short stories that will make your reputation as a writer. It's something that's never been done. No one has dared to do it. Their heads were full of this so-called Expressionism. They thought they were being subjective. Pooh! They hadn't the stamina. Their minds were costive. All that they could produce was as dry as sheep-droppings—

'You see, these fools imagine that Realism is writing *about* emotions. They think they're being very daring because they name things by the catch-words these Freudians have invented. But that's only Puritanism turned inside out. The Puritans forbid the use of the names; so now the Freudians order the use of the names. That's all. That's the only difference. There's nothing to choose between them. In their dirty little hearts, the Freudians fear the names just as much as the Puritans do—because they're still obsessed by this miserable medieval Jewish necromancy—the Rabbi Loew and all that. . . . But the true Realism—the kind nobody dares to attempt—has no use for names. The true Realism goes behind the names—

'So what I would do is this—'

Here Mr Lancaster paused impressively, rose, crossed the room, opened a drawer, took out a pipe, filled it, lighted it, shut the drawer, came back to his chair. The process took nearly five minutes. His face remained dead-pan throughout it. But I could sense that he was simply delighted to keep me in suspense—and, in spite of myself, I really was.

'What I would do,' he at last continued, 'is to write a series of stories which do not describe an emotion, but *create* it. Think of it, Christopher—a story in which the word "fear" is never mentioned and the emotion of fear is never described, but which *induces* fear in the reader. Can you imagine how terrible that fear would be?

'There'd be a story inducing hunger and thirst. And a story arousing anger. And then there'd be another story—the most terrible of all. Perhaps almost too terrible to write—'

('The story inducing sleep?' I didn't say this, but I thought it—very loud.)

'The story,' said Mr Lancaster, speaking very slowly now to get the maximum effect, 'which arouses the Instinct of—Reproduction.'

My efforts to view Mr Lancaster scientifically were not merely for art's sake. I realized by now that he was capable of having a truly shocking effect upon my character. It was very dangerous for me to stop regarding him as if he were some kind of grotesque beetle, and start thinking of him humanly; because then I should hate him for bullying me. And if I went on hating him and letting myself be bullied by him, I should sink into a vicious, degenerate bitchery; the impotent bitchery of the slave. If I believed in reincarnation—and why not?—I could easily believe that I had been Mr Lancaster's slave-secretary, in the days of classical Rome. We had probably lived out in a tumbledown villa on the wrong side of the Appian Way. I would have been the sort of slave who fancies himself as a poet and philosopher, but is condemned to waste his time transcribing the maunderings of his Master and endure his earth-shakingly trivial thoughts about the mysteries of Nature. My Master would have been poor, of course, and stingy, too. I would have had to double my duties; fetching wood and water and maybe cooking as well. But I would put on airs with the slaves from the other villas and pretend that I never had to do anything menial. At nights, I would lie awake planning his murder. But I should never dare go through with it, for fear of being caught and crucified.

No—Mr Lancaster had to be taken scientifically or not at all. You had to study him like lessons. I actually made notes of his table-talk.

'The worst of this work I'm doing now is, it doesn't really use more than a hundredth part of my brain. I get mentally constipated. In the War, my battery major used to set me gunnery problems. I'd solve them in the day. Gave three alternative solutions to each—without mathematics—

'There's *one* thing, Christopher, that you *must* realize. It is necessary in this world to believe in a positive Force of Evil. And the joy of Life—the *whole* joy of Life—is to fight that Evil. If we lose sight of that, we lose the meaning of Life. We fall into the ghastly despair of Glycon:

Panta gelos, ki panta konis, ki panta to maden,

panta gar ex alogon esti ta ginomena. . . .

All is but laughter, dust and nothingness,

All of unreason born. . . .

That's where the Pagans came to an end, the edge of the Shoreless Sea. That was all they knew. But we have no excuse to follow them. For against their negation we can now put Gareth's tremendous affirmation; his reply to his mother when she urged him to stay at home and amuse himself with the distractions of a purposeless life:

Man am I grown, a man's work must I do.
Follow the deer? follow the Christ, the King,
Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King—
Else, wherefore born?

Never forget that, Christopher. Repeat it to yourself every morning,
as you wake up. Else, wherefore born? Never ask: can we win?
Fight, fight!

Charge once more, then, and be dumb!
Let the victors, when they come,
When the forts of folly fall,
Find thy body by the wall!

None of your clever modern men has Arnold's voice. Meredith had it. William Watson had it—he was the last. Then the clever-clever moderns swarmed on to the stage, and we lost the message.

'I could have given it back to them. I could have revived it. But I heard another call. It was one morning in early summer—at the edge of the Mer de Glace, just below Mont Blanc. I stood looking out over that vast, dazzling sea of ice, and a Voice asked me: Which will you be? Choose. And I said: Help me to choose. And the Voice asked: Do you want Love? And I said: Not at the price of Service. And the Voice asked: Do you want Wealth? And I said: Not at the price of Love. And the Voice asked: Do you want Fame? And I said: Not at the price of Truth. And then there was a long silence. And I waited, knowing that it would speak again. And at last the Voice said: Good, my Son. Now I know what to give you—

'You have everything before you, Christopher. Love hasn't come to you, yet. But it will. It comes to all of us. And it only comes once. Make no mistake about that. It comes and it goes. A man must make himself ready for it; and he must know it when it comes. Some are unworthy. They degrade themselves and are unfit to receive it. Some hold back from receiving it—call it pride, call it fear—fear of one's own good fortune—who shall judge? Be ready for the Moment, Christopher. Be ready—'

One morning, when Mr Lancaster had started out for the office, I saw that the writing-desk he usually kept locked was standing open. As he had left the key, with his key-bunch attached to it, sticking in the keyhole, I guessed he would soon discover his mistake and come back. So my investigations had to be quick.

The first thing I found was an Army service revolver, evidently another of Mr Lancaster's sentimental war-souvenirs. This couldn't have interested me less; I felt certain the desk must contain some worthier secret. I leafed through old paid bills and obsolete railway

timetables; handled bits of wire, blackened light-bulbs, broken picture-frames, rusty parts of some small engine, perished rubber bands. It was as if Mr Lancaster had sternly bundled up all that was untidy in his character and stowed it away here out of sight.

However, in the top drawer—the most prominent and therefore least likely place, I had thought, which was why I looked there last—I found a thick notebook with a shiny black cover. I was thrilled to see that it was full of poetry in Mr Lancaster's handwriting; a long narrative poem, apparently. I could do no more than hastily skim through it—lots of Nature, of course—mountains, seas, stars, boyhood rambles and ruminations in the manner of Wordsworth—and God—lots and lots of God—and travel—and the War—oh dear, yes, the War—and more travel—hm-hm-hm—aha, what was this? Now we were getting somewhere at last!

And there was One—

Long, long ago—dear God, how very long!—
 Who, when the lilac breathed in breathless bloom
 And later buds their secrets still withheld
 Yet promised to reveal, as soon they must,
 Since it was so ordained—as evening came
 She too was there, her presence felt ere seen
 By him who watched for it. She never knew
 What meaning filled the twilight with her step,
 What emptiness, for him, the twilight brought
 When, soon, she came no more—the ways of Life
 Leading her elsewhere. And she never knew,
 Going her ways about the world, what deed,
 Unknowing, she had done; into what heart
 She had brought beauty and left bitter pain.

I can't remember how the lines struck me then, because I regarded them simply and solely as a find. My treasure-hunt was successful. I was absolutely triumphant. Seizing pencil and paper, I scribbled them down, thinking only of how I would read them aloud to my friends when I got back to London.

I had barely finished my copying when I realized that Mr Lancaster had re-entered the flat. He had made far less noise than usual. There was no time to cover up the traces of my search. All I could do—and I think it showed great presence of mind—was to drop the notebook into the drawer and take out the revolver. It was at least less embarrassing, I thought, to be caught examining a revolver than an autobiographical poem.

'Put that down!' Mr Lancaster barked hoarsely.

He had never used that tone to me before; it startled and enraged

me. 'It isn't loaded,' I said. 'And, anyhow, I'm not a child.' I put the revolver back in the drawer and walked straight out of the room.

(Looking back, I now reinterpret Mr Lancaster's behaviour. I see how his conversation was full of attempts to arouse my interest in him. Didn't he expect, for example, that I'd ask him what it was that that Voice on the Mont Blanc glacier had finally given him? Hadn't he even hoped that I'd beg him to tell me about his love-life? And wasn't the leaving of the key in his desk a deliberate, if subconscious, attempt to make me read his poem? If I'm right—and I think I am—then my youthful cruelty to Mr Lancaster was in my lack of curiosity. For I just failed, through a kind of emotional laziness, to be really curious about him. My would-be scientific study of him was altogether unscientific, because I was sure in advance of what I was going to find—which no scientist should be. I was sure he was a bore.

So, when Mr Lancaster came in and found me looking at the revolver instead of the notebook, he must have been bitterly disappointed; even if he couldn't have explained to himself why. Hence his outburst of temper.

As for the revolver, maybe he had almost forgotten its existence. And maybe it was actually I who reminded him that it was lying there, all the time, in the bottom drawer, a gross metallic fact in the midst of his world of fantasy.)

Two days before I was due to return to England, Mr Lancaster took me sailing. He didn't ask me if I wanted to do this; he simply announced his plan and I accepted it. I didn't really care what happened, now. Since the incident of the revolver, our relations were chilly. I was merely counting the hours till I could leave.

We left after the office closed that evening, in his car, to drive out to the village on the river where he kept his boat. On the way, we picked up Sr Machado. I was glad to have him with us, for I didn't want to spend any more time alone with Mr Lancaster. Much later, it occurred to me that Machado was probably the only one of Mr Lancaster's acquaintances left who would agree to come with him on a trip of this kind. No doubt many of them had tried it—once.

The three of us were squeezed into the front seat of Mr Lancaster's little car, with the outboard engine, under its tarpaulin cover, sitting up in the back. Quite soon, we lost our way. Mr Lancaster, who had forgotten to bring the map, became increasingly jittery as we bumped along a narrow sand road in the twilight, skirting a marsh. Old farmhouses stood half awash amidst water-meadows. A crane

walked stiffly along the wall of the dyke, and went flapping away over the lush wet landscape. I felt a dreamy, romantic contentment steal over me. What did it matter, where we were? Why be anywhere in particular? But Mr Lancaster was frantic.

Just as it began to get really dark, two figures appeared out on the marsh, in a punt. Mr Lancaster stopped the car, ran up on to the dyke and hailed them. They were very small and tow-headed, a boy and a girl. It was almost incredible that they could manage the punt at all; and this made them seem more like very intelligent animals than terribly stupid children. They stood hand in hand in the punt, staring up at Mr Lancaster with their big vacant blue eyes; and their mouths open, as if they expected he was going to feed them. Mr Lancaster addressed them—as he told me later—in High and Low German. He spoke as one speaks to idiots, so slowly and without such elaborate pantomime that even I could understand what he said. But not those children. They just stared and stared. Mr Lancaster began to shout and wave his arms, but they didn't flinch. They were too stupid to be afraid of him. At last he gave it up in despair, turned the car around and drove back the way we had come.

Very late at night, we finally arrived at our destination. The place was crowded with holiday-makers; and only one room was vacant at the inn. It must have been one of the best rooms, however; for it had an imposing bed on a dais, as well as a studio couch. The chief decoration was a photogravure of an almost nude woman in an 'artistic' pose; this stood on an easel with a piece of figured material like tapestry draped around it. Mr Lancaster decided that he would sleep on the couch and Sr Machado on the bed. I was to go back to the cabin of Mr Lancaster's boat. 'It'll be an experience for me,' I said sarcastically; before he could say it. But Mr Lancaster was deaf to sarcasm.

I woke in the early but already brilliant morning, and found myself—as so often when one is young—undecided whether to romanticize my situation or sulk. My situation was romantic, I had to admit. Here I was, all alone in this foreign land, in sole occupancy of a sailing-boat! No doubt these people were watching me and wondering about me. Although it was barely six o'clock, most of the holiday-makers seemed to be up.

The village was built along the river-bank, with beer-gardens running down to the water's edge. The boats were decorated with sprays of poplar at their mast-heads; and schoolboys had fastened them to the handlebars of their bikes. On board the boats there were gramophones, and people were playing concertinas and sing-

ing. Beer was being drunk and sausages munched, and you could smell the delicious smell of out-of-door coffee. The girls were plump but pretty; the men were cropped blond and piggy-pink. As they sang, they shaved or combed their hair, and were temporarily silenced as they brushed their teeth into the river.

All this filled me with joy. But on the debit side of the day there was my stiffness from sleeping curled up on the tiny bunk in the cabin; plus a headache. And there was Mr Lancaster, who now appeared and was cross because I hadn't tidied the cabin or finished dressing; was, in fact, sprawling on the deck in the sun. By the time we had had breakfast at the inn and I had become constipated — my usual reaction to having to use strange toilets and being told to hurry — the sulks were on.

And then the engine was mounted on the boat, but it wouldn't start. A mechanic had to be fetched from the garage; while he was working, quite a large crowd gathered. All that Mr Lancaster could contribute was his fussing and nagging. Nevertheless, he made the occasion a text for one of his reminiscent sermons: 'This reminds me of the War. I remember getting out of a village near Loos just before dawn, because we knew the Hun would start shelling as soon as it got light. I was curious to see how I would stand the strain, because our Colonel obviously had the wind up. So I took my pulse. It was *absolutely* normal. I found my brain was functioning so well that, as I was giving orders to my Sergeant-Major, I visualized a chess-problem I'd read in *The Times* a few days before. It was black to play and mate in three moves, and I saw the solution, Christopher. I didn't have to think about it at all. I simply looked at it, as you look at the map of a town and say to yourself: 'Well, quite obviously, *that's* the quickest way to the market-square.' There couldn't be any question. And I have no doubt whatsoever that I could have played at least half a dozen games simultaneously at that moment, and won all of them. What is it Sophocles says about the greatness of Man when his mind rises to its highest in the face of Fate — ?' And he was off again into a long straggling string of Greek. How right Hugh Weston was in saying that it is the most hideous of all languages!

At last we were off, heading toward the sea. Mr Lancaster snapped at me like a dyspeptic old turtle because I dropped some of his fishing-gear. I scowled back at him like a ten-year-old. To snub me and show me my place, he then concentrated on Machado, talking to him in Spanish. This was nothing but a relief, as far as I was concerned; but it worried Machado, whose courtly Latin manners demanded that he should communicate with me, now that he was

aware of my existence. (I'm sure he simply did not remember we had sat next to each other at that dinner.) So he spoke to me from time to time in French, which I had great difficulty in understanding, because of his fearful accent. The worst of Machado's remarks was that they were not only hard to understand but harder still to develop into any kind of conversation. For example, he said: 'Je suppose que le sujet le plus intéressant pour un écrivain, c'est la prostitution.' To which I could only reply enthusiastically: 'Mon-sieur, vous avez parfaitement raison'. And there we stuck.

We were in the estuary now; the river was already very wide. Mr Lancaster ordered me to steer the boat, while he got the fishing-rods ready for action. 'You've got to be on the alert from the first moment,' he told me: 'This river's full of sandbars. Careful. Careful! CAREFUL! Look at the colour of that water ahead! *Dead* slow through here! Steady, now! Steady. Steady. Steady. Steady. Now—open her up! OPEN! Quick, man! Port! HARD to port! Do you want to swamp us?' (There was a very mild swell as we left the river-mouth; you could hardly even feel the change of motion.) 'Away, now. *Dead* ahead! Hold her two degrees sou'west of the point. Hold her on her course. HOLD HER! Careful, man! Good. Good! Oh, good man! Very pretty! Well steered, sir! I'm greatly afraid, Christopher, that we're going to make a sailor out of you yet!'

I had done nothing to be praised for, except that I hadn't run us into a buoy as big as a haystack. Mr Lancaster's enthusiasm was as crazy as his anxiety. Yet once again—as in the case of the cold bath—I was idiotically flattered. Ah, if he had realized how easily manageable I was; how instantly I responded to the crudest compliment! No—even if he had realized it—this would have made no difference in his treatment of me. Flattery was something Mr Lancaster would never have bestowed upon me; he would have regarded it as bad for my soul.

I suppose he felt no responsibility for Machado's soul. For he began to butter him up in a manner that was absolutely shameless, speaking French, now, for my benefit. He called Machado a 'good sport', using the English words and then explaining them in French, until Machado understood and clapped his hands with delight: 'Good spot! I—good spot? Oh yes!'

'Isn't he a dear old man?' said Mr Lancaster to me, benevolently. 'He's three-quarters Peruvian Indian, you know. His father probably chewed coca and never wore shoes. That's your real unspoiled dago for you. Doesn't matter what age he is—he always stays a child.'

We were now quite far out on the flat shallow sea; the low shore

of dunes was already only a pale line between the sparkle of the water and the shine of the sky. White sails were curving all over the seascape. Mr Lancaster, evidently feeling very pleased with himself, stood in the bows intoning:

Pervixi: neque enim fortuna malignior unquam
eripiet nobis quod prior hora dedit.

I knew, with sudden intense force, just how awful the *Odyssey* and the voyage of the *Pequod* must have been; and that I would have sooner or later jumped overboard rather than listen to either of those ghastly sea-bores, Ulysses and Ahab.

Presently Mr Lancaster announced that it was time for us to fish. Machado and I were given the rods. We trailed our lines inexpertly in the water. This might have been quite restful, if Heaven hadn't rebuked my laziness by performing a most tiresome miracle—nothing less than a miraculous draught. We ran into a school of mackerel!

Mr Lancaster was absolutely beside himself: 'Careful! CAREFUL, MAN! Easy—easy—easy! Don't let the line slack! You'll lose him! Play him, man. Keep playing him! Fight him! He's a wily devil! He'll trick you yet! Don't look at *me*, man! Watch him; WATCH HIM! Keep your head! Keep calm! NOW—'

All this was more superfluous than words can tell; for, in fact, there was nothing—absolutely nothing—we could have done to avoid catching those miserable fish—short of throwing the rods away and lying down in the bottom of the boat. Machado wasn't speaking French now, or even Spanish. He emitted what sounded like tribal hunting sounds maybe in some Indian dialect of the Andes. At first, I caught some of the excitement and yanked the fish in as fast as I could. Then I began to get tired. Then rather disgusted. It was so indecently easy. By the time we were through, I think we had at least thirty fish in the boat.

After the catch, Mr Lancaster set himself to clean some of the fish we were to eat; so he didn't pay much attention to Machado. I was steering. Happening to glance over in the old man's direction, I saw that he was leaning right over the side. His back was tense and his legs were stiffly straddled. My first thought was that he was having a stroke. But no—he was pulling desperately at something in the water. He looked as if he were trying to haul up the bottom of the sea. He turned his head towards me, half strangling with the exertion. 'Poisson!' he gurgled; only it sounded more like 'possum!'

Naturally, I jumped to my feet to help him. What was my amazement—and subsequent fury—when I received a violent backhander in the chest from Mr Lancaster! He knocked me right over back-

wards, and I sat down very hard. I think if I'd had a knife, I'd have whipped it out right then and there, and finished him. As it was, I merely mentally shouted: 'Touch me again, you old goat, and I'll throttle you!' Meanwhile, Mr Lancaster was yelling in my face: 'Leave him alone, you silly little fool!' I suppose he saw the blazing hate in my eyes; for he added, somewhat less hysterically; 'Never help a man when he's landing a fish! NEVER! Don't you ever know that?'

He turned from me to attend to Machado, who was heaving on his line. Mr Lancaster knelt beside him, speaking to him in French, soothing him, urging him, entreating him, imploring him to breathe deeply, to relax, to keep up the pressure, gentle and slow. 'Ca va mieux, n'est ce pas? Ca marche? Mais naturellement—' He was absurdly like a midwife encouraging a woman in labour. And sure enough, slowly, slowly, with infinite pain, Machado was delivered of an enormous fish—a tuna, Mr Lancaster said. When he had gaffed it, we let it trail in the water behind the boat, to keep it fresh.

Then Mr Lancaster cooked the mackerel on a spirit stove. I would have liked to be strong-minded and refuse to eat. But I was ragingly hungry. And although Mr Lancaster, with his usual incompetence, had burned the fish badly, it smelled and tasted delicious. Besides, I was in an awkward position because I couldn't possibly be nasty to Machado who was in a state of utter triumph and had to be congratulated repeatedly. Quite probably, this would be the last really happy day of his life. I compromised by ignoring Mr Lancaster. He didn't appear to notice this.

In this mood, we started for home. Mr Lancaster kept remarking complacently on his own foresight; he had calculated our timetable so that we were going with the tide both ways. But the long chugging voyage seemed tedious enough, even so. As we got into the river-mouth, I was steering again and Mr Lancaster was nagging at me. We must have been off-course, but how was I to know? It was no use trying to follow his pseudo-nautical directions. I just went ahead by sight.

Suddenly he screamed: 'SAND! SAND AHEAD! PUT HER ABOUT! HARD! HARD OVER!'

What happened next was quite unplanned. At least, I had no conscious knowledge of what I was going to do. Nevertheless, I did it. I had the feel of the tiller by this time; I could sense pretty well how much it would stand. All I did was to obey Mr Lancaster's order just the merest shade too energetically. I swung the tiller hard over—very hard. And, with the most exquisitely satisfactory rending crack, the cross-piece to which the outboard engine was

clamped broke off, and the engine fell into the water.

I looked up at Mr Lancaster and I nearly grinned.

For a moment, I thought he would swallow his adam's apple. 'You fool!' he screamed. 'You fool! You confounded little idiot!' He stepped over to me, making the boat rock. But I wasn't in the least scared, now. I knew he wouldn't—couldn't—hit me. And he didn't.

As a matter of fact, the water was so shallow that we didn't have much trouble in dragging up the engine. But of course there was no question of getting it started again; it needed to be thoroughly cleaned, first. So there was nothing for it but to sail back to the village.

The sail lasted all the rest of the day. There was very little wind; and Mr Lancaster seemed to making the worst possible use of it, for nearly every boat on the river passed us. He steered, glumly. Machado was peacefully asleep, after his exertions. Finally we were taken in tow by a pleasure-steamer. Mr Lancaster had to accept this courtesy because it was beginning to get dark, but I could see how it humiliated him. A man and a woman, neither of them slender or young, were sitting in the stern of the steamer, invisible to the other passengers but right in front of us. Throughout the trip, they made love with abandon. And this, too, was a sort of humiliation for Mr Lancaster; because the lovers evidently felt that his reactions weren't worth bothering about. I felt that I was on the side of the lovers, and smiled at them approvingly; but they weren't bothering about my reactions, either.

As for myself, I was in a wonderful mood. The semi-deliberate ditching of the outboard engine had discharged all my aggression, like a great orgasm. Now I no longer felt the least resentment against Mr Lancaster. Indeed, I had stopped thinking about him. My thoughts had gone racing on ahead of my life, of me on this sailing-boat; they had left Mr Lancaster and Germany far behind. They were back in London, in my room, at my desk. But I wasn't even unduly impatient to return there physically; for, meanwhile, I had plenty to think about. After all—despite Mr Lancaster—this silly day would be memorable to me throughout my life. For, right in the midst of it—maybe at the very instant when that engine had splashed into the water—I had had a visitation. A voice had said: 'The two women—the ghosts of the living and the ghosts of the dead—the Memorial.' And, in a flash, I had seen it all—the pieces had moved into place—the composition was instantaneously *there*. Dimly, but with intense excitement, I recognized the outline of a new novel.

The day came for my return to England. The *Coriolanus* was sailing in the evening.

That morning, Mr Lancaster informed me, with his usual nonchalance, that Waldemar was to take me to the Art Gallery. Waldemar and I were to have lunch together—since Mr Lancaster had a business appointment—and I was to be back at the flat at four fifteen precisely, I made no comment.

But, as soon as Waldemar and I were alone on the Gallery steps and Mr Lancaster had disappeared around the corner, I turned to him and firmly shook my head. 'Nein,' I said.

Waldemar looked puzzled. Pointing to the Gallery entrance, he asked: 'Nein?'

'Nein,' I repeated, smiling. Then I pantomimed a breast-stroke.

Waldemar's face brightened instantly. 'Ach—schwimmen! Sie wollen, dass wir schwimmen gehen?'

'Ja,' I nodded. 'Swimmen.'

Waldemar beamed at me. I had never seen him smile like that, before. It changed his whole face. He no longer looked at all angelic.

He took me to a big municipal open-air pool. I had passed this place several times but, with my almost utter lack of German, had never had the nerve to go in there alone. The bath was crammed with splashing yelling blond brown boys and girls. I was one of the very few grown-up people there.

Waldemar didn't seem passive, now. He bought our tickets, got me my towel and soap, greeted numerous friends, steered me into the locker-room, made me take a shower and showed me how to tie on one of the triangular red bathing-slips he had rented. When he undressed, it was as if he took off his entire office personality. He appeared to be bigger, maturer, more alive and more relaxed. And he no longer behaved to me as if I were forty years old and in league with Mr Lancaster. We smiled at each other tentatively, then started to wrestle, splashed and ducked each other, swam races. Waldemar swam like an eel. But though we were playing like kids, I was chiefly aware of the fact that he was already a young man.

Presently we were joined by a friend, a boy of his own age, named Oskar. Oskar was monkey-faced, impudent, dark and grinning. He spoke fairly fluent English. He was a page, he told me, in one of the large hotels. And I was aware of the page-mentality in him; he had been around, he knew the score, and he looked at me speculatively, like one of his hotel guests who might have special requirements he could satisfy in exchange for a tip. He had giggled asides with Waldemar and I knew they were discussing me; but I

didn't mind, because Oskar took great trouble to make me feel one of the party.

After swimming, we went to a restaurant for lunch. Both the boys smoked and drank beer. I had the impression that Waldemar was anxious to appear as sophisticated as his friend. By this time, we were calling each other Oskar and Christoph.

Waldemar said something to Oskar and they both roared with laughter.

'What's the joke?' I asked.

'Walli says he thinks his bride will like you,' Oskar told me.

'Well—good. Is she coming here?'

'We go to see her. Soon. All right?'

'All right.'

'All right!' Waldemar laughed very heartily. He was slightly drunk. He reached across the table and shook my hand hard. Oskar explained: 'Walli's bride likes also older gentlemen. Not too old. You—very good! Pretty boy!'

I blushed. A most delicious gradual apprehension began to creep over me.

'You have five marks?'

'Yes.' I produced them.

This amused the boys. 'No, no—for later.'

'But, Oskar—' I felt we were somehow at cross purposes, 'if she's Walli's bride—And, anyhow, isn't he much too young to have a bride?'

'Already at twelve I have a bride. Walli also.'

'But—won't he be jealous if I—?'

More laughter. Oskar told me: 'We shall not leave you alone with her.' I must have looked more and more bewildered, for he patted my hand reassuringly: 'You need not be shy, Christoph. First, you watch us. Then you see how easy it is.' He translated his joke to Waldemar and they laughed till the tears ran down their faces.

Braut in dictionary-German means a bride or fiancée. But boys like Oskar and Waldemar used it to refer to any girl they happened to be going with. This, and many other things, I learned in the course of that happy shameless afternoon. I didn't get back to Mr Lancaster's flat until nearly six o'clock.

I was too dazed with pleasure to have cared if he had scolded me; but he didn't. In fact, he appeared to be back in the mood in which he had received me on the day of my arrival. He just didn't seem particularly interested in my existence. 'Give my regards to your Mother,' was all he said, when we parted. I felt slightly hurt

by his coldness. However little I might care. I was still young enough to be sincerely shocked when my indifference was returned.

When I got back to London, I found that my novel was indeed a flop. The reviews were even worse than I had expected. My friends loyally closed ranks against the world in its defence, declaring that a masterpiece had been assassinated by the thugs of mediocrity. But I didn't really care. My head was full of my new novel and a crazy new scheme I had of becoming a medical student. And, always, in the background, was Berlin. It was calling me every night, and its voice was the harsh sexy voice of the gramophone records I had heard in the bed-sitting room of Waldemar's 'Bride'. Sooner or later, I should get there. I was sure of that. Already I had begun to teach myself German, by one of those learn-in-three-months methods. While riding on buses, I recited irregular verbs. To me they were like those incantations in the Arabian Nights which will make you master of a paradise of pleasures.

I never sent a copy of *All the Conspirators* to Mr Lancaster, of course. But I wrote him a thank-you letter—one of those thankless, heartless documents I had been trained since my childhood to compose. He didn't answer it.

When I tried to describe him to my friends, I found I could make very little of him as a significant or even a farcical character. I just did not have the key to him, it seemed. And when I read my copy of his poem to Allen Chalmers, we were both rather embarrassed. It simply wasn't bad enough in the right way. Chalmers had to be polite and pretend that it was much more ridiculous than it actually was.

I also touched on the subject of Mr Lancaster's love-life in talking to my Mother. She smiled vaguely and murmured: 'Oh—I hardly think *that* was the trouble.' I learned from her what she hadn't thought even worth telling me before—that Mr Lancaster had actually been married for a few months, after the War; but that his wife had left him and they had separated legally. 'Because,' said my Mother drily, 'Cousin Alexander wasn't—so one was given to understand—at all adequate as a husband.' This revelation of Mr Lancaster's impotence quite shocked me. Not on his account—it was pretty much what I would have expected—but on my Mother's. I never fail to be shocked by the ability of even the most ladylike ladies to live in cosy matter-of-fact intimacy with the facts of Nature. My Mother was surprised and rather pleased by my reaction. She was aware that she had managed for once to say something

'modern', though she couldn't altogether understand how she had done it.

I suppose I should gradually have forgotten all about Mr Lancaster, if he hadn't regained my interest in the most dramatic way possible. Toward the end of November that same year, he shot himself.

The news came in a letter from Mr Lancaster's Assistant Manager, the 'second in command' who had lent me his dinner-jacket for the banquet. I had met him briefly after that at the office and thanked him. I remembered him only as a florid little Yorkshireman with a broad accent and a capable good-natured manner.

The letter informed us of the bare facts, in a tidy business-like style. Mr Lancaster had shot himself one evening at his flat, but the body had not been discovered until the next day. No suicide note had been found, or any papers 'of a personal nature'. He must have burned the notebook with his poem, I supposed. He had not been unwell at the time. He was in no financial difficulties; and the affairs of the Company were giving him no cause for anxiety. The Assistant Manager concluded with a line of formal condolence with us on 'our great loss'. No doubt he mistook us for blood-relatives, or felt that we had anyhow to represent the Family, since there was nobody else to do it.

Mr Lancaster's act impressed me a great deal. I strongly approved of suicide on principle, because I thought of it as an act of protest against Society. I wanted to make a saga around Mr Lancaster's protest. I wanted to turn him into a romantic figure. But I couldn't. I didn't know how.

The next year, I did at last go to Berlin; having thrown up my medical career before it was properly started. And there, some while later, I ran into Waldemar. He had grown bored with his native city and had come to Berlin to seek his fortune. We became great friends.

Waldemar, naturally, knew very little about Mr. Lancaster's death. But he told me something which amazed me. He told me that Mr Lancaster had often spoken of me, after I had left, to people in the office. Waldemar had heard him say that I had written a book, that it had been a failure in England because the critics were all fools, but that I should certainly be recognized one day as one of the greatest writers of my time. Also, he had always referred to me as his Nephew.

'I believe he was really fond of you,' said Waldemar, who was a sentimentalist at heart: 'He never had any son of his own, did he?

Who knows, Christoph, if you'd been there to look after him, he might have been alive today!

If only things were as easy as that!

I think I see now that Mr Lancaster's invitation to me was his last attempt to re-establish relations with the outside world. But of course it was already much too late. If my visit had any decisive effect on him, it can only have been to show him what it was that prevented him from having any close contact with anybody. He had lived too long inside his sounding-box, listening to his own reverberations, his epic song of himself. He didn't need me. He didn't need any kind of human being; only an imaginary nephew-disciple to play a supporting part in his epic. After my visit, he created one.

Then suddenly, I suppose, he ceased to believe in the epic any more. Despair is something horribly simple. And although Mr Lancaster had been so fond of talking about it, he probably found it absolutely unlike anything he had ever imagined. But, in his case, I hope and believe, it was short. Few of us can bear much pain of this kind and remain conscious. Most of the time, thank God, we suffer quite stupidly and unreflectingly; like the animals.

Empsonium



This *ars poetica* will lightly sit
On tersely riming fridays choc-a-block
With symbolled dicks of concentrated wit.

The summer salts provide a learned shock,
Eject old schools, accommodate the new.
The chosen downs catch droppings from the flock.

So it goes on. The monkey puzzle grew,
The apes in cloistered anguish learned to scrawl
Diverting teasers. When lily trumpets blew,
They had their wits about them, that is all.

NOTES:

Ars poetica. . . The poetic theory will sit lightly on the practice because it refers mainly to technique. *Tersely riming*: a play on 'terza rima'. *Fridays*: poetic conceits are represented here by fish (Fish are slippery and elusive. Like images in the unconscious mind, many of the rarer varieties live at a considerable depth and are startling when brought up to the light of day. Also there is a popular belief that fish as food is good for the brain). 'Fridays' are poems because they are by tradition fish days. They are also fry-days: the poems, small and neat, are apparently designed to accommodate little fish. *Symbolled dicks*: the poems are, in fact, stuffed with whales—complex symbols like Moby Dick. In Cockney usage, dicks are 'big fancy words'. *Fri . . . choc-a-block*: Fry's chocolate-block, the Chocolate Sandwich, has more than one layer of chocolate, as the Empsonian conceit has more than one layer of meaning.

The first stanza bears a second interpretation. With a slight alteration in spelling, *ars* becomes the occupier of a Chair. Its academic status (or sessus?) entitles it to the Latin 'poetica'. It will be present, if only through its influence, at literary gatherings on a certain day of the week ('So-and-so's Fridays'). These are also fry-days, days for disciples and imitators, the tersely riming small-fry. *Dicks* are clever-dicks and detectives, because of the kind of ingenuity required in construing an Empsonian poem. *Symbolled* becomes 'cymballed': equipped with (tinkling) cymbals.

Salts—a common metaphor for wit—are the poet's works, and also the salts of the sea and the earth. The salts of the sea, when they become highly concentrated (as in the Dead Sea), get rid of old schools of fish which cannot adapt themselves, as the salts of highly concentrated wit eject worn-out poetic devices. *Summer* implies the attainment of ripeness, maturity: as the salts of the earth, through their fertilizing effect in summer, help to provide a shock of wheat, so the poet's mature works produce, besides a shock in the ordinary sense, a learned harvest of criticism. *Schools* now refers to schools of criticism. *Summer salts* become the somersaults of verbal agility. *Downs*: the combination of 'salts' and 'Empson' recalls 'Epsom': the downs are the chosen works on which the flock of critics and scholars bestow the emblems of their nourishment. There is a play on the etymological components of 'catalogue': works catalogued are 'chosen down'.

The *monkey puzzle* is the puzzle of the meaning of life for man: first, through an allusion to Darwinism, humanistic; and secondly, as the 'monkey' puzzle, theological. *The apes in cloistered anguish*: Cloisters belong to the university and the monastery, neither of which has produced a satisfactory solution. *Learned to scrawl diverting teasers*: a second meaning is extracted here by imagining a comma after 'scrawl': the dual implication of 'diverting teasers' emphasizes the irony of the artistic solution. In England the university-trained pioneer of wit-writing was Lyly. *When lily trumpets blew* alludes to the performance of his stage-diversions, which share with the trumpet-shaped lily an appearance of artificial elegance; to the process of 'inspiration', which sounds both the musical instrument and the artistic mind; and to the trumpets of royal patronage. In the juxtaposition of this and the preceding group of ideas there is a hidden reference to 'performing apes'. *Wits* are also the wits of the court and the university. *That is all*: in the secondary reading 'that is awl', excessive wit is symbolized by a small sharp instrument which bores.

Correspondence

Sir,

In your August issue Sir Herbert Read attacked the Rede Lecture, my views, my work, and incidentally my honesty. I do not feel like replying at length, for two reasons. First, I have recently received a criticism of the Rede Lecture from Mr G. H. Bantock, who argues with great precision a case not dissimilar in origin from Sir Herbert Read's. Mr Bantock's was just the kind of criticism I hoped for, if we are to get any nearer the truth, and it will be a pleasure for me to discuss it, along with other views, in *Encounter*. Mr Bantock's argument is maintained at a high level of intellectual responsibility. Second, and by contrast, Sir Herbert Read does not possess any sense of intellectual responsibility at all. I do not mean that he is dishonest; but I do mean that in a serious intellectual sense, his left hand does not know what his right hand is doing. Let me take just one example which has nothing to do with me, or the Rede Lecture, or any of my concerns.

In 1936 Sir Herbert Read published a long introduction to a collection of articles on Surrealism (*Surrealism*, Faber, 1936). In 1952, he reprinted this essay under the title of 'Surrealism and the Romantic Principle' in his *Philosophy of Modern Art* (Faber, 1952, Second Edition 1954). He gives no indication that any view or argument has been modified in the reprinted essay; and indeed it seems reasonable that he should not, since, almost in its entirety, it follows the 1936 draft, word by word. There is, however, one change of substance. In 1936 (reference above, p. 60) we see:

'Surrealism, like Communism, does not call upon artists to surrender their individuality.'

In 1954 (reference above, Second Edition, p. 127), in a paragraph otherwise completely unaltered, there is a slight difference. The sentence now reads:

'Surrealism does not, like Communism, call upon artists to surrender their individuality.'

Orwell, in 1984, never invented anything half as neat. I do not think any gloss is called for. Anyone can change his opinions; but anyone who can change his opinions in that particular way is not worth arguing with. So that I will content myself with selecting from Sir Herbert Read's piece three of his latest *Bouvardisms*, and by correcting, *just* for the sake of the record, six points where he has falsified what I wrote.

Bouvardisms. 1. 'It is still possible to maintain, with reason and scientific truth, that usury has been the major cause of misery

in the modern world.' It is possible to maintain that Joanna Southcott's box contains the secrets of national survival. In fact, 'usury' was an essential technique in men's breakthrough from a traditional agricultural society. If that breakthrough had not happened, ninety-five per cent of the human race would have continued to live, as they have always lived in traditional agricultural societies, and still do, like uncared-for animals.

2. 'That he will exchange the peace and poverty, the languor and cow-shit, of his present village, for the noise and lethal fumes of internal combustion engines . . . is possibly regarded as a small price to pay for the material progress he has achieved.' Go and tell that to the Indians and Africans about whom Sir Herbert Read is writing. Go and tell them: it will be something else for them to forgive.

3. 'Life—the vital source of the will to live—depends not on comfort or even on "health, food and education".' Tell that to the poor of the world also.

Falsifications

1. 'Sir Charles confuses the issue by identifying the scientific with the industrial revolution, but there is a distinction that is both factual and historical. Sir Charles nowhere makes this distinction.' Out of forty-eight pages of the Rede Lecture, two (pages 29-31) are devoted to doing precisely that.

2. 'Sir Charles Snow can hardly disguise his contempt for our leading intellectuals—he mentions Mr T. S. Eliot, Yeats . . .'

3. ' . . . Lawrence and other "men of feeling" for whom he has nothing but contempt.' In the Rede Lecture I said (p. 7) that Yeats was a great poet. Similarly I have expressed my admiration for both Lawrence and Mr Eliot in print. When I say something, I mean it.

4. 'He covers his own opinion by quoting the opinion of an anonymous "scientist of distinction".' This is presumably an attack on my honesty, which rather surprises me. The scientist in question was Edwin Hubble.

5. 'It is not only that he can utter a "straightforward truth", such as "industrialization is the only hope of the poor", without any sense of its crookedness.' I will finish the quotation (p. 24). '*Industrialization is the only hope of the poor. I use the word "hope" in a crude and prosaic sense. I have not much use for the moral sensibility of anyone who is too refined to use it so.*'

And finally, 6. 'I will not speak of a tragic sense of life which in the past has been the source of moral dignity— are we not all agreed that tragedy is to be banished from the Welfare World?'

This is Sir Herbert Read's last paragraph. To one who hasn't read my lecture it may just possibly seem odd to be told that I wrote this (p. 6): *'Most scientists I have known well have felt—just as deeply as the non-scientists I have known well—that the individual condition of each of us is tragic. Each of us is alone: sometimes we escape from solitariness, through love or affection, or perhaps creative moments, but those triumphs of life are pools of light we make for ourselves while the edge of the road is black: each of us dies alone . . . But nearly all of them (scientists) would see no reason why, just because the individual condition is tragic, so must the social condition be.'*

London, SW5

C. P. Snow

Sir,

Sir Herbert Read quotes Sir Charles Snow's remark:

'Nine out of ten of those who have dominated literary sensitivity in our time—weren't they not only politically silly, but politically wicked? Didn't the influence of all they represent bring Auschwitz that much nearer?'

This is badly worded and imprecise but I should be interested to have a list from Sir Charles Snow of ten names with the nine guilty.

George Orwell, Middleton Murry (who discovered Orwell), I. A. Richards, T. E. Hulme, F. R. Leavis, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, James Joyce, Edward Garnett, Dylan Thomas, Edith Sitwell, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, literary editors like Murry, Desmond MacCarthy, J. C. Squire, Alan Pryce-Jones, John Lehmann, Peter Quennell, Edgell Rickword, Cyril Connolly and Raymond Mortimer—all of these have had a considerable influence on 'literary sensitivity' in our time though nobody, I think, has 'dominated it' in the sense that possibly Gide, Valéry and Mauriac 'dominated' the French literary scene in the 'twenties.

Are they all judged guilty by Sir Charles Snow? Did they all, because of their influence, help to bring Auschwitz nearer?

Can't the poor devils who are still alive appeal to anyone from the wrath of this fugleman from Cambridge? Perhaps their sense of guilt was so overpowering that it led Virginia Woolf to commit suicide and Dylan Thomas to drink himself to the grave?

The Two Cultures is a handy illustration of present-day scientific bigotry and conceit.

I congratulate Sir Herbert Read—a remarkable man from the Hulme - Eliot - Pound - Lewis - Stevens - Murry generation—on his strictures.

17 Clarence Avenue, Cleveleys, Blackpool

Frederick Anyon

Book Reviews

THE YOUNG REBEL IN AMERICAN LITERATURE. Edited by Carl Bode.
(Heinemann. 16s.)

In this volume Professor Bode has printed seven lectures given at the American Embassy in London in 1957 under the sponsorship of the United States Information Service. The 'young rebels' were Thoreau, Whitman, Sinclair Lewis, Scott Fitzgerald, Mencken, Steinbeck and Faulkner, and the lecturers were all dons, two of them British, the rest American.

The book begins rather tepidly. The lecture-jokes — 'born (squalling indignantly, no doubt) in 1817' — and lecture-judgments — 'a novel that has a great deal in it' — that the ear would have tolerated make the eye wince. I think English readers would have found useful a pithy account of Thoreau's ideas, but Professor Bode (himself the lecturer on that author) does not quite give it to us. He has some interesting things to say about that remarkable essay *Civil Disobedience* and about *Walden*, but they are too disjointed, too diluted by the hostages a lecturer sometimes feels obliged to give to his audience. Mr David Daiches sees Whitman's rebellion as against the solipsistic melancholy of English nineteenth century poets, but when he tries to draw a parallel between Whitman's verse and the stream-of-consciousness technique in the novel, and brings in the objective correlative, inscape, and the death of the heart, one feels that he has ceased to be illuminating, merely knowing. Mr Geoffrey Moore succumbs to the temptation to use his impressive familiarity with Sinclair Lewis's work in the way of a general account of it: he would have done better to stick to his brief, for it is there that any interest in Lewis is still to be found. Professor Walter Bezanson is lively and skilful about Fitzgerald, but he has an even harder task than Mr Moore in trying to disinter the young rebel.

The book only really starts to come to life with Professor Lewis Leary's ambivalent study of Mencken. 'I find Mencken in strange company in this series which begins so well with Thoreau and ends so provocatively with Faulkner,' he protests. 'I should have expected to find within it such men as Emerson, our great focus of revolt, or Melville, who dared the peril of diving deeply; George Santayana . . . might be there, and even Ezra Pound. . . .' He takes the words out of our mouth. And yet, he goes on to say, when one asks oneself which are more representative of protest in the United States, the subjects of this volume or the wiser, more tentative and profound omissions, one must sadly recognize that the collection was well planned, that

American rebels are 'journeymen, content with patchwork repairs, shrill, self-pitying or self-congratulatory. . . .' There is obviously truth in this, though Professor Leary puts the statement in its extreme form, and it is amusing to find that he himself, in the course of criticizing Mencken, remarks that it was not that author but more serious creative writers who were responsible for pulling the United States 'from the quagmire of self-satisfaction' in which it wallowed in the twenties—as though it had ever ceased to wallow!

These lectures, then, on the whole, play down or fail adequately to reveal the rebelliousness of American literature—just as if the United States Information Service had been frightened to go too far. Not to mince words, an important part of that literature is strongly left wing, made not only by writer-socialists, like Jack London, but also socialist-writers, like John Reed. The American radical tradition is scarcely mentioned in the present volume, and even a book like Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here* is dismissed in a few lines, while the thirties are characterized as a period when the writer lost his true theme, the individual.

The dominant motive of American literature is well described by Professor R. W. B. Lewis in his excellent piece on Steinbeck: 'a celebrational sense of *life*, a sense of promise and possibility and of as yet unspoiled novelty in man and his habitation, a mystical sympathy both for the individual and for what Whitman called the "en-masse"'. It is the beating of this sense and sympathy against the walls of money, philistinism, and cruel authority that has led to the creation of so much dissident literature in the United States, literature that has the power to move us even when it is steeped in sentimentality—as in Whitman and Steinbeck—or obscurity—as in Melville and Faulkner. The names and the treatment in this book do not adequately show us this 'other' America, though its intention of doing so is entirely worthy and timely.

ROY FULLER

VISION AND RHETORIC: STUDIES IN MODERN POETRY by G. S. Fraser.
(Faber and Faber. 25s.)

THE CHEQUER'D SHADE: REFLECTIONS ON OBSCURITY IN POETRY by
John Press. (Oxford. 25s.)

Since criticism has been exalted from a lower branch of history to a lower branch of philosophy, it has been easier than ever to overlook the real justifications for its existence. It exists simply to help the reader or to advise the writer. The best criticism does both at once. Yet I find critics—even some I greatly admire, like Mr Blackmur and Mr Trilling—continually ready to forget such

practical purposes. Mr Blackmur's style, for instance, tends to become more complex than that of the work he is discussing, and Mr Trilling takes lengthy excursions into personal anecdote or large questions about society. These are certainly two of the best living critics: but they are mistletoes ambitious to become oaks. So it is good to find Mr Fraser and Mr Press frankly setting out with the clear-cut and worthy intentions of lessening the reader's difficulties and, where necessary, of guiding him.

Mr Fraser presupposes a reader of considerable sophistication, and he is—in spite of his modest preface and unassuming tone—himself a critic of sophistication, who is prepared to tackle the full implications of his job without oversimplifying. Most people reading this review will remember his work as poetry critic on the *New Statesman* in the early fifties, when he was for several years not only the best regular poetry reviewer around but the only one who had anything to say. He was consequently of much influence in shaping the assumptions of the fifties about poetry. At times I have felt that *Vision and Rhetoric* too conservatively sticks to the obvious accepted twentieth century canon in choice of subjects, but then I have had to remind myself that Mr Fraser was one of the men who most notably consolidated that canon and that it was he as much as any other who adjusted it so that there was room for Graves and Empson. These essays are reprinted from periodicals: as he points out, with understandable pride, the essay on Graves was published before Graves had become fashionable—and I have a strong suspicion that it was Mr Fraser who helped make him fashionable.

On one subject, modern American poetry, he is curiously imperceptive. When, for example, he refers to 'William Carlos Williams's poetry of redbrick houses, suburban wives, cheerful standardized interiors' he is speaking of a poet no reader of Williams would readily recognize. And the essay on Cummings and Stevens (what a pairing!) is certainly the poorest in the book: he hardly comes to grips with the weaknesses of Cummings and seems completely mystified by Stevens. In fact Mr Fraser seems rather mystified by modern America itself. What else could one conclude when, after quoting a certainly unfortunate phrase from some minor American critic, he talks of it as 'an example of the odd vulgarity that jars on one, from time to time, even in literate and sensitive American prose'. Such a remark is so vague that it would be impossible to either refute or support.

On other subjects he does drop, almost as asides, some strange loose generalizations every now and again: e.g. 'All great poets are

more profoundly capable of love than common men, and they may be more terrifyingly capable of hate, too' (surely it is just that they are more articulate?). But normally his generalizations only proceed from his very explicitly described reactions to a particular work. At the end of the essay called 'Yeats and "The New Criticism"' he says, 'The critic may *apply* certain methods. But he does not, in the end, rely on his methods. He relies on himself.' I like this attitude, implying as it does a recognition that one's final evaluations depend on the personal cultivation of many different modes of perception. As his remark indicates, he is shy of critical theory. Sometimes his reluctance to theorize is a real weakness—as in his last essay, which I find very inconclusive. But when he is not called upon to justify his critical position, when he wants merely to produce limited generalizations—generalizations towards which certain analyses will inevitably tend—he is brilliant. The best two essays in the book, I think, are those on *The Orators* and on Graves. These really contribute to our understanding of Auden and Graves. And several of the others approach the high standard of these two essays—for example when he is writing, with both enthusiasm and balance, on the difficult subject of Dylan Thomas. Faced by a text, a passage, a complete poem, he is usually magnificently right. Here he is defining Eliot's conversational tone in *Prufrock*:

(It) is not, for instance, that of Pope, even when Pope is most direct and least mannered. . . It is not that of Byron in *Don Juan*, a garrulous, loquacious tone. It is not the buttonholing, breathing-down-your-neck tone that Browning has sometimes. It may, however, have something in common with all these three writers; like Pope, Mr Eliot gives an effect of frequenting always the best company, who can quickly pick up a hint or an allusion; like Byron, he can be apparently inconsequent and flippant; like Browning he can conceive a poem most effectively as a sort of dramatic soliloquy . . .

The language of *Prufrock* feels like conversation, but it is rather a dramatic imitation of conversational language. . . *Prufrock*, for all its setting at a fashionable party, for all its air of being a Henry James short story, drastically boiled down (the 'story' left out, and the moral, the atmosphere left in) is really a tragic-comic soliloquy.

This is merely part of his discussion, and I have had to omit about three pages of it. What is so good about it is its plain sensible aptness. The remark about Browning, for instance, or the parenthesis in the last sentence: these are in a sense obvious, but only in the way that Dr Johnson's best criticism is obvious. Mr Fraser

is aware of his real strength when he speaks in the preface of his approach to literature as 'a kind of groping tact'. It is groping because, at his best, he will not have preconceptions about the work in question but will grope out for *what is there* almost as if he were reading it for the first time; and it is tact because he is always respectful of the writer's intentions, whether the writer is Larkin or Thomas, Yvor Winters or Sir Herbert Read.

Mr Press is another poetry reviewer whose attitude to criticism is modest and practical. But he writes for a reader far more inexperienced than Mr Fraser's. In his conservative summing up of the reasons for obscurity there is much I find too obvious. The first three chapters, for instance, hardly tell me anything I didn't know before. Yes, poetry can be difficult because of obscurity in vocabulary, thought, and reference. But the point, as such, hardly needs making at this length.

One of the troubles of his book, in fact, is a kind of distendedness not of style but of design. He will always illustrate even when illustration is unnecessary, and when illustration is necessary he will supply so many quotations that we begin to wonder whether we are reading a book of criticism or an anthology.

But in spite of his wide range of reference he has at least twice overlooked rather important books, very relevant to his subject. In his eighth chapter he seems unaware that Yvor Winters summed up the problem under discussion some fifteen years ago, and far more impressively. And in his ninth chapter, while discussing Shakespeare's imagery, he fails to take Rosamond Tuve's explorations into account. Miss Tuve's book on Elizabethan and Metaphysical images is difficult reading, but it is tremendously important, and any discussion of the subject which does not recognize this is bound to be inadequate.

In spite of all this it is not a bad book. It is honest and well-written, and is full of sensible and sometimes illuminating remarks. If none of it is new, at least very little of it is misleading.

THOM GUNN

MISTRESS TO AN AGE. *The Life of Madame de Staël*. By J. Christopher Herold. (*Hamish Hamilton*. 21s.)

Madame de Staël is one of those larger-than-life figures, endowed with more than the normal ration of vitality, who are always bursting out of any frame within which one tries to confine them. Society, politics, literature and thought—she played a lively and leading part in all these spheres, while living a personal life of in-

credible complexity, fullness and intensity. She went everywhere, she knew everybody, she was always in the limelight and in a ceaseless whirl of activity. Her life was scored for full orchestra, and a Berlioz orchestra at that, with four brass bands. Mr Herold, in this new biography, interprets it like a maestro.

To her contemporaries she was a holy terror or the most wonderful woman in the world. How do we think of her today? as Necker's adoring daughter, Napoleon's *bête noire*, Constant's tempestuous and tyrannical mistress; the authoress of long hysterical novels, or of extracts in anthologies on the Romantic Movement; the hostess presiding over mad house-parties of her admirers in a Swiss chateau (talk, love-making, novel-writing, highbrow games, play-acting, talk and more talk), or the stout lady with flashing eyes and garish turban travelling all over Europe, startling Regency London by her manners and browbeating German philosophers and poets? With all this, what was she really like? Above all, what was the secret of her attraction — which made Constant write, a few weeks after meeting her: 'She is a being apart, a superior being such as appears but once in a century . . .' and his cousin Rosalie, a more detached observer, declare: 'She is an astonishing woman. The feelings to which she gives rise are different from those that any other woman can inspire . . . One is carried away, subjugated by the force of her genius. It follows a new path; it is a fire that lights you up, that sometimes blinds you, but that cannot leave you cold and indifferent . . .' It was certainly no physical beauty, no charm of person, no specific virtue of character or intellect; rather sheer vitality of mind and spirit which, like some life-giving force, communicated itself to others. 'When she had her inspired moments,' Mr Herold comments, 'her listeners were absolutely under her spell, sometimes even reacting physically, so tense was the excitement she generated.' She was dynamic, passionate, completely unselfconscious; she radiated enthusiasm, that quality she praises in the closing chapters of *De L'Allemagne* as 'the only feeling that gives true happiness, that enables us to bear our human destiny' — the essential fire of the human spirit. Those with whom she came in contact felt more alive, more real; this made her power irresistible. But in the relationships thus formed she found none of the abiding happiness she craved. Her lovers could not stay the course. She was too egotistic, too dominating, her emotions too intense and exacting, her energy too unflagging. The harrowing story of her long-drawn-out affair with Constant is well known; the pattern was repeated.

She wanted the best of both worlds, and therein lay her personal tragedy — moralized over in *De l'Influence des Passions*, fictionalized

in *Delphine* and *Corinne*. She wanted the power and glory denied her in a man's world, and a woman's quiet domestic happiness too. She knew herself to be an exceptional woman, doubly an outsider on that account.

Energy such as hers needed a wider field on which to display itself. 'Apart from being in love,' Mr Herold says, 'nothing intoxicated her more than being in history.' And in history she very much was, until Napoleon thrust her out. Through Revolution, Directoire and Empire she fought fiercely and stubbornly, despite setbacks and disillusionments, for her ideal: a moderate representative government and civil liberties. 'Rarely,' Mr Herold comments, 'was so much emotion placed at the service of so rational an aim.'

The same combination of passion and rationalism was, as he points out, characteristic of her ideological role. She was an authentic heir to the Enlightenment, steeped in the *philosophes* and Rousseau and yet forward-looking in her anticipation of later thought to an astonishing degree. She believed in progress through science, stressing the connection between scientific discoveries and social relations ('*Si l'on dirigeait un jour la navigation aërienne, combien les rapports de la société ne seraient-ils pas différents?*') and the need for moral ideas and political government to keep pace with man's mastery over nature ('*En augmentant la puissance de l'homme, il faut fortifier le frein qui l'empêche d'en abuser*'). She believed in the civilizing function of art and literature, which do not 'progress'. She hated superstition and fanaticism; her 'enthusiasm' was something very different.

Mr Herold's book is a model of its kind. He is learned (as tens of pages of bibliography, including much unpublished material, bear witness!) yet light-handed, witty as well as wise. Combining detachment with sympathy, he brings out his extravagant heroine's greatness as well as her occasional grotesqueness; he sketches with a masterly pen the countless figures that played a part in her life, and he is equally adept at tracing the course of history and at the critical analysis of ideas.

Will his book send people back to read Mme de Staël's? Their faults are obvious—superficialities and inconsistencies of thought, dogmatism, the exalted rhetoric ('enthusiasm' *rechauffé*) that made Stendhal feel sick. She writes with the emphasis and prolixity of the improviser; she lacks the essential distinction of style. Yet there is much that is rewarding in *De la Littérature* and *De l'Allemagne*, more even than Mr Herold's admirable summaries suggest. There is the personal note, moving when it is not exasperating (perhaps Byron's *mot*, 'She thinks like a man, but alas! she feels like a woman'

might be modified; there was something masculine about her thirst for power, her assumption of the dominant role in any relationship, and something feminine about the way she let feeling colour thought, and personal experience intrude among abstractions). There are provocative and seminal ideas scattered throughout. I pick at random: her feminism — her eloquent plea for the rights of women, '*la nature et la société ont deshérité la moitié de l'espèce humaine*', her analysis of their position in different civilizations and countries; her unromantic respect for science, mingled with an occasional shudder at the thought of a mechanically ruled universe; penetrating comments on Shakespeare (e.g. on '*les sublimes effets que Shakespeare sait tirer des mots simples, des circonstances vulgaires placées avec art*') and a fascinating study of the characteristics of different languages.

Scholars may assess influences; she was, as Mr Herold says, 'the most talented brain-picker of the age', but she certainly made her own synthesis and infused her own warmth and conviction. Again and again one captures from these pages some spark of that dynamic personality, and can agree with Mr Herold that 'decidedly, Madame de Staël is not dead.'

JEAN STEWART

- TO SIR, WITH LOVE by E. R. Braithwaite. (Bodley Head. 13s. 6d.)
 THE ENGLISHMEN by Laurence Lerner. (Hamish Hamilton. 15s.)
 THE BREAKING OF BUMBO by Andrew Sinclair. (Faber. 15s.)
 A GAP IN THE SPECTRUM by Marilyn Duckworth. (New Authors Limited. 13s. 6d.)
 THE BIG BOXCAR by Alfred Maund. (Longmans. 13s. 6d.)

Three of the novels under review are concerned with personal integrity. These, together with the other two, are all first novels and this means that there is a freshness and urgency about them which may in later novels either develop into a personal style or lapse into a formula. A first novel remains the standard by which a new novelist is judged; his second is likely to please no-one. If it resembles the first in any way at all, then its author will be condemned for repeating himself; if, on the other hand, it is quite different, the writer is very likely to be accused of writing beyond his strength or his knowledge. Most second novels are, in fact doomed to a chorus of disappointment.

The novels by Mr Braithwaite, Mr Lerner and Mr Sinclair are three variations on the theme of integrity. They deal with the

central concern of most serious mid-twentieth century fiction. With the general decline of religion and recognition of a divine order, the moral choice of the individual has been elevated not only to a final court of appeal but also into an aesthetic standard. The conscience of the individual man or woman now provides the battleground of a novel as well as its conflict and tension. Puritanism has, in fact, reappeared, though it is sometimes discovered under curious disguises. Where, in France, novels are sternly separated into the two camps of Catholicism on the one hand, and Existentialism or some other secular philosophy on the other, in England (a country which has never been at ease with the novel of ideas) they remain personal, autonomous and undeological. Even the 'Catholic' novels of Graham Greene approach Catholicism obliquely; Mr Greene is almost always concerned with the indirect, the devious. A hero such as Scobie in *The Heart of the Matter* would almost appear to be trying to catch God out, to be pitting an entirely personal sense of integrity against divine legislation.

Mr Braithwaite's book is a thinly veiled autobiography. The plot concerns a young coloured man from British Guiana who comes to England during the last war, joins the RAF and, after the war, hopes to put his excellent scientific training at the service of Great Britain. His idealism is, however, thwarted by colour prejudice. Unable to find work as a scientist, Rick Braithwaite gets a job as a teacher in a rather unusual Secondary Modern school in the East End. Here, mingling with a group of teachers who are mostly women, he is able to exorcize his sense of inferiority and failure by helping the uncouth adolescents under his care to become responsible adults. In effect, he rediscovers his own integrity by teaching these children honesty and a sense of duty. He also falls in love with one of the English teachers and his love is returned.

Mr Braithwaite's story is not a new one. Edward Blishen's *Roaring Boys* and Michael Croft's *Spare the Rod* have prepared us for the cruelty and vulnerability of teenagers. What is new in this book is the compassionate portrayal of the relationship between the white children and their coloured teacher; Mr Braithwaite gives a fresh and thoughtful view of a familiar scene.

Mr Lerner's novel, *The Englishmen*, is also concerned with education and with the colour bar. It is a more complex and less well-constructed book than *To Sir, With Love*. Richard Baxter, a South African teacher in a school for white boys near Cape Town, is obsessed both by his weaknesses and his ideals. Quentin Tracy, fresh from Cambridge, comes out from England to join the staff of the school and precipitates the drama in which Richard discovers his

own limitations. Tracy, casual, witty, 'advanced' in his teaching methods, attacks the South African colour prejudice by simply ignoring it with a kind of arrogant indolence. His presence also has the effect of breaking off Richard's rather lukewarm engagement to a girl called Sara. *The Englishmen* fails, I think, because Mr Lerner has tried to cram too much into it. The action shifts too rapidly from Richard's personal problems to the complacency of the South Africans and the poverty and misery of the despised natives. The novelist has not succeeded in imposing order on his elaborate material so that the final chapter, where Richard acknowledges his own frailties and thus recovers some sort of integrity, does not entirely convince; one feels that too many demands have been made on one. The best parts of the book are the descriptions of the fertility and variety of the African landscape.

The Breaking of Bumbo is the most exciting and promising of all the books under review. Mr Sinclair wrote this novel when he was only twenty-two, yet it has none of the weaknesses of many young men's first novels; there is no introspection, no self-pity and no empty gesturing in his book. *The Breaking of Bumbo* is a moral tale; it depicts the rise and fall of Bumbo Bailey, an ensign in a distinguished Guards regiment called the Reds. The story is seen entirely through his eyes. Romantic, idealistic, well-meaning and endearingly weak, Bumbo moves through a world he half wants and half despises. Mr Sinclair shows him at an OTC, on duty at Wellington Barracks, and gliding in a condition of bedazzlement and disgust through the London season. The book reaches its climax when Bumbo incites his men to rebel against the Government's handling of the Suez situation. But even then his character fails him since, instead of publicly and heroically defying the Army, Bumbo finds himself forced to resign ignominiously. The novel ends with his fashionable marriage to a girl he does not love.

Mr Sinclair writes with verve, wit and a curiously compassionate perception. *The Breaking of Bumbo* is an exercise in self-revelation by its hero as well as an uproarious study in the loss of self-respect. Bumbo is a clown, certainly, but he is a tragic clown; he acquires self-knowledge not only through unhappiness but also by being confronted with his own egotism. The scene in which Billy, Bumbo's best friend, exposes this egotism is one of the best in the book. 'The trouble with you, Bumbo,' says Billy, 'is that you're so bleeding versatile, you're such a bloody great Kohinoor with so many bloody great shining facets, you're so many things to so many people, that you've forgotten to get used to a face of your own. You're just a variety show. And it's a bad time for variety. Diminishing audiences.'



LONGFELLOW

(and short ones, too)

Tell it now in joyful numbers,
Life with Guinness is more gay
Poets, peasants, peers and plumbers
Drink five million every day.

Yes,

**FIVE MILLION
GUINNESS**

are enjoyed every day



believe that Mr Sinclair shows all the signs of a very promising novelist indeed.

Marilyn Duckworth's *A Gap in the Spectrum* is more concerned with atmosphere, with creating an effect of strangeness, than with human behaviour or integrity. Diana Clouston, her chief character, wakes up one morning in a world she does not recognize. Everyone looks odd, herself included. Like a somnambulist, she moves into a life that does not seem quite real. She finds letters from a fiancé she did not know existed, wears clothes that do not seem like hers, and finds jobs to which she is ill-suited. After a disturbing love-affair in Paris with an unreliable young man called Stephen, Diana settles down to live with him in a squalid room in southern England and then starts a job in a mental hospital. The scenes in this hospital are the most vivid in the book.

The reader is, I think, expected to regard Diana as a visitant from another world (a mythical country called Micald is occasionally referred to). But this novel fails because the deliberately sustained atmosphere of vagueness or amnesia has the opposite effect to the one the author intended. The book irritates rather than excites and, as with Mr Lerner's novel, one is left with the feeling that something has been thrust upon one, that too many demands have been made both on one's emotions and one's credulity. Miss Duckworth has undoubtedly a real gift for descriptive writing, both in depicting rooms and streets and in suggesting the nuances of feeling. Her book would have been much more effective if it had relied on this gift rather than on an over-ingenuous trick.

The Big Boxcar by Alfred Maund, an account of the journey through Alabama of a group of Negroes, is more concerned with the will to live than with personal integrity. This novel makes use of the convention whereby a collection of ill-assorted people are flung together and, in alien surroundings, reveal something of their true natures. Reminiscent at times of Eudora Welty, the book has a physical power which seems to be entirely the author's own. I feel that he might well write something very interesting indeed in a less conventional genre. It is not often that sheer force is so successfully combined with sympathy and compassion.

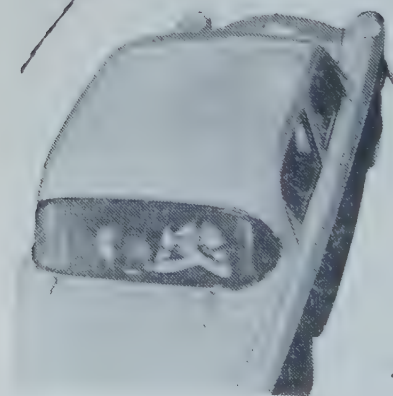
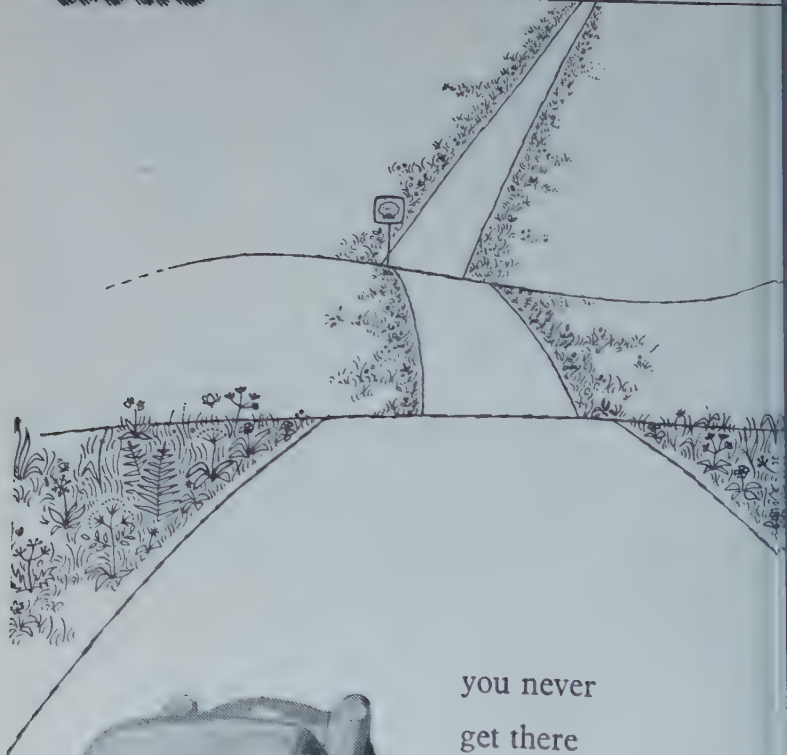
ELIZABETH JENNINGS

EIGHTY-FIVE POEMS by Louis MacNeice. (Faber. 10s. 6d.)

'Selected', 'Collected', and now 'Eighty-five', which is a kind of 'extended selected'. The *Collected* covered the years 1925-48, and since then there have been *Ten Burnt Offerings* and *Visitations*, a number of poems from which appear in the present volume. Mr



is for HORIZON



you never
get there
but it's fun
to try on

**Super
SHELL**

you can be S for SURE of it



MacNeice has not chosen what he considers his eighty-five best poems, nor even the eighty-five he likes best. 'My main object has been to illustrate different phases *and* different kinds of my work.' Nor has he arranged them chronologically. 'The order of this selection, divided into eight groups, is meant to be more or less significant.' That 'more or less' is a typical piece of MacNeice foxiness; well, is it or isn't it? Mr MacNeice habitually leaves the question open: what is more, he reserves the right to say one thing and mean another, or, more precisely, to suggest that things both are and aren't at exactly the same time, which is generally the truth—the same again but different'.

This collection, therefore, is an Eight-in-one MacNeice, the poet in eight parts. Not taking the sections in the order in which they appear (which is meant to be 'more or less' significant, at least indicative of the fact that the unity of some of the groups is not easily apparent) the more obvious ones are MacNeice—Irishman (Carrickfergus, Dublin, Slum Song, etc.), MacNeice—wartime poet (beginning with Prognosis, and including such fine poems as Brother Fire, The Springboard, Convoy), MacNeice—poetic journalist (Sunday Morning, Museums, Nature Morte, August), MacNeice—loving (June Thunder, First Light, Leaving Barra, Meeting Point, A Toast), MacNeice—brooding and philosophizing (Mahabalipuram, Easter Returns, Prayer in Mid-Passage, Prayer Before Birth). That leaves three sections and I'm not sure how to categorize them—perhaps they belong to the 'or less' class.

Mr MacNeice may, in certain senses, be a chancy poet, if by that one means, to use a cricket term, that in chancing his arm rather than consistently playing a dead bat, he scores a few off the edge. But, less often than any of his contemporaries does he write an awkward or graceless poem. He is fluent, idiomatic, technically skilled and he brings these virtues to bear, with journalistic efficiency, on a variety of themes, none of them beyond the reach of ordinary (in this sense, non-literary) people. He manages, moreover, to give to the casual phrase overtones of depth, to make of it something haunting and romantic, and by a kind of juggling with cliché to restate it in more subtle terms. He is equally capable of taking a serious philosophical concept and reducing it, without disfiguration, to the basis of a lyric. In each of his eight roles he remains relaxed, offhand, devoid of solemnity: yet through all his poetry there runs a delicious irony that is always on the verge of turning nostalgia into self-mockery and of laughing off anguish. He is aware of the ballooning powers of abstraction, and however involved the subject a tug of the string usually brings it to earth.

The Ten Pains of Death

GAVIN MAXWELL

Recommended by The Book Society

Sicily is an area of Western Christian Europe where the people still live in conditions of primitive squalor, destitution, oppression and hopelessness. In *The Ten Pains of Death*, Gavin Maxwell has recorded in the words in which they were told to him the autobiographies of several individuals of all classes in Sicily; amongst these individuals are a doctor, a nun, a schoolmaster, a prostitute, a pedlar and others. There are linking passages of narrative describing the background of these harsh and violent lives. This book is a frightening reminder of the appalling social conditions which exist in Sicily today.

30/4

LONGMANS

PEARLS BUCK

**an important
new novel**

**COMMAND
THE MORNING**

METHUEN

In *Command the Morning*, Pearl Buck has written about the most awesome achievement of our time—the splitting of the atom, and the manufacture of the atomic bomb. Following the actual sequence of events in the creation of the bomb, Pearl Buck uses fictional characters to tell the story. They slowly become aware of the potential force of the thing they are striving to create, and then come to grips with the inevitable problem of whether or not the bomb shall be used.

16s

These are not ordinary gifts, in fact among contemporary writers MacNeice is that rare thing, a serious poet of the apparently commonplace. Like Graves, only more obliquely, he risks an occasional heart-to-heart with the face in the mirror and, with ostensibly little more concentration than as if he were shaving, draws out from the reflection more than it knows. His poetic world, like the world we inhabit as individuals, if not apparently all of us as poets, is that same one out of which newspapers are made. The newsprint smudges off on it, which to some is a limitation, to some a recommendation.

Which is it? There are occasions when, looking back on the poems of ten or twenty years ago, the lyrics seem to come a shade too pat, the verbal agility to be over-obtrusive (though the most self-consciously adroit have been kept out). But in those poems where the comment is close to the surface of events, which therefore would seem most likely to date, there is an accuracy and acuteness of observation, an integrated compassion that keeps them fresh. Because, of course, Mr MacNeice remains, even in those personal man-to-woman poems that have the immediacy of popular songs, above all a fastidious craftsman. The poems are properly fashioned objects, with a clear outline, and whether you like them or not, and even if you doubt their staying- or horse-power, you cannot deny their high finish.

Ireland, Oxford, the Midlands, America, wartime London, India and the Near East, they have all left their mark, and yet in a curious way the poet 'restless as a gull and haunted by a hankering after Atlantis', has evaded them all. Perhaps he is no longer haunted in quite the same way, perhaps gazing 'on the black dregs and the yellow scum' the regrets are different from what he had imagined, the escape 'from the weekday time which deadens and endures' even harder. Yet, though from time to time Mr MacNeice makes attempts to situate the accidents of an arbitrary fate within the schemes of recognized philosophies, it is usually as an uncommitted, equable, non-partisan, fatalistic victim of his own and other people's whims that he contemplates the world around him. He is the poet of rueful acceptance, who has passed the time away by making, in Cyril Connolly's words, 'unbreakable toys of the mind, mudpies that endure'.

Possibly the impulse has weakened during the BBC years, poetry has ceased to mean quite what it did; or it may be that it can no longer be reached for as easily as once it could. Yet the verse play that is not an amateur charade, the libretto for a ballad opera or experimental musical, have always seemed more within Mr MacNeice's grasp than anyone's. He has, one would have thought, the

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MACMILLAN

necessary flair, the wit, the style, and, more important than these, sense of how poetry can be adapted for other, wider purposes.

Perhaps he may yet attempt the sustained dramatic work that, more than Eliot or Tennessee Williams, could make poetry natural to the theatre, or the libretto that could, as Brecht once did and Osborne has dismally failed to do, set ideas to music in an adult, satirical but essentially lyrical way?

ALAN ROSS

LIGHT AND PURSUIT by Stuart Holroyd. (*Gollancz*. 21s.)

This book, being written in a markedly loose and windy manner, with an extraordinary lack of any sense of the ridiculous, and with self-absorption in no evident relation to the writer's actual position in the world of letters, is naturally an easy target for ridicule. But Mr Holroyd is not an arrogant man, and certainly he is not a conscious charlatan. One should, therefore, do one's best to assess the merits of his case, so far as its substance can be disengaged from the defects of its form. What has he to say?

Mr Holroyd first takes the stage in adolescence, disillusioned with politics, Methodism, orthodox education — 'it became very clear to me that everything was a lie'. He found, in the years after the war, what he justly calls this 'mood' to be not uncommon among his contemporaries and elders. But whereas most of these seemed content to acquiesce in scepticism, Mr Holroyd felt — 'with the deepest certainty of my being' — that they were wrong to do so. He felt in himself a 'private destiny', and, though at one time inclined to let the world go hang, decided at last that he must 'define himself' in opposition to the prevalent mood of disenchantment. Withdrawal was not enough.

The next section of the book concerns the relation of 'western man' to 'nature'. This section is very obscure. Mr Holroyd's main point seems to be that it is better to feel at home in the natural world, than to feel one's physical environment as alien and oppressive; but he adds, surely wrongly, that in order to achieve this it is necessary to accept the curious view that love is 'the cohesive force of the universe'. Mr Holroyd's own reconciliation with nature was not aided, he says, by orthodox Christian doctrine, nor by his inspection of the British Empiricists. But Whitehead he found helpful — and here it may be conjectured that the extreme obscurity of Whitehead's writings made it possible for Mr Holroyd, reading rather sketchily, to find in them anything that he began by looking for.

Next, other people — 'the other', as Mr Holroyd calls them. Here again, Mr Holroyd was at one time disposed to regard other people

as natural antagonists, to be dominated, impressed, or, failing that, ignored. But again he has become able, he tells us, sometimes not to feel this—he is sometimes able now to approach other people on what he feels to be, more or less, equal terms.

So next we come to 'the overwhelming question'. For to be on good terms with nature and other people is, though desirable, not enough; what about life, and death, and meaning, and God? No. Mr Holroyd is a convinced exponent of the view that mortality disvalues everything; how can anything be of real value or importance, if *in the end* nothing makes any difference? 'Ultimately nothing matters.' Mr Holroyd points out, quite rightly, that if one accepts this, one cannot then argue in favour of living in this way rather than in that, or indeed at all; for one has ruled out the production of grounds for any such preference. And from this point his argument moves rapidly to its conclusion.

First, since it cannot be accepted that nothing matters, we must accept a belief in immortality. In what sense? Mr Holroyd says that we must think of all valuable things—people, actions, thoughts, objects—as adding to a sort of *total stock* of value in the universe which he calls a World of Value. To be immortal in his sense is to be a component of this total stock. He allows that this makes no mention of personal survival, so that it is not persons who are immortal; but he remarks, hopefully, that 'the man who really embodies value looks for no other form of immortality'. But then he brings God in. For after we have rejected a number of the commoner and cruder conceptions of God, we can believe in God as, so to speak, the guarantor of the World of Value—'we have to postulate someone or something capable of entertaining . . . the hierarchy of values . . . and thus you arrive at the concept of God'. It is for this acceptance of (some kind of) God that Mr Holroyd's book is particularly commended by his publisher.

Now Mr Holroyd writes here as if he were solving some problem, but it seems to me that, beneath the rhetoric and mystification and dramatization, he is saying that the problem really does not arise; and he could have done this a very great deal more simply. For what the God-grounded immortality of his World of Value enables him to hold, is that what has value does not cease *even to have had* any value, when it ceases to exist. The value that it *had* is not shown to *have been* nothing by its ultimate non-existence; therefore, that something in the future *will not* exist does not require us to hold that it *now has* no value. But this, when one comes to think of it, is clear in any case, without the support of any transcendental apparatus—the fact that all houses are eventually

emolished does not entail that no house is now comfortable to live in, or that there has never been any point in living in houses. The dictum that 'ultimately nothing matters' is unfortunately ambiguous: it permits, and possibly generates, a confusion between (1) the truism that (in the end, if there is an end) nothing will matter, and (2) the falsehood that (in the last analysis) nothing *now* does matter. But no one could very seriously wish to dispute, once distinguished, either the truth of the truism or the falsity of the falsehood. This being so, it appears that Mr Holroyd's 'religious' beliefs either amount to the very same thing as the ordinary opinions of ordinary people, or are a superstructure upon them for which there is no evident necessity.

But of course there is still for some people—and it would be absurd to deny this—the mood in which, as one dwells on the hard fact of mortality, all our daily concerns seem to pale into insignificance. Mr Holroyd's mistake, I think, is to regard this as a problem. If it is, his 'solution', however dramatically presented, is simply question-begging—it merely says that not everything is really insignificant. But such a mood is not really a problem; it is a misfortune, for which luckily nature, in most cases, supplies a remedy.

G. J. WARNOCK

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Notes About Our Authors

CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD's story *Mr Lancaster* will eventually form part of a longer fiction work, the title of which has not yet been chosen.

SYLVIA PLATH was born in Boston, Mass. She graduated from Smith College in 1955 and attended Newnham College, Cambridge, from 1955-57. She is now an instructor in English at Smith College, and is the wife of Ted Hughes.

IAIN CRICHTON SMITH was born in the Island of Lewis in 1928 and was educated at Aberdeen University. His publications include a book of poems *The Long River* (1955) and he was chosen by the late Edwin Muir as one of the three contributors to his *New Poets* (Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1959).

RICHARD KELL, born in South Ireland in 1927, spent five years of childhood in India. He was educated in Belfast and Dublin, and graduated from Trinity College, Dublin. He is now working in London, has contributed to many Irish and English periodicals, and has a first book of poems awaiting publication.

THE AUTUMN READING NUMBER

The London Magazine

Vol. 6, Number 11, will be out at the beginning of November, and will contain among other contributions

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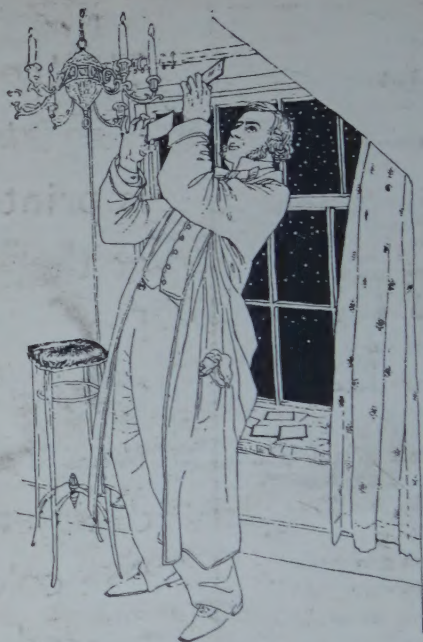
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SIR WILLIAM CROOKES is most widely known for his prophecy, in 1898, that exhaustion of the Chilean nitrate deposits would lead to world starvation unless alternative sources of nitrogen compounds were discovered. Among scientists he is recognised as one of the fathers of spectroscopy—the analysis of light into its component wavelengths. Crookes also discovered thallium, an element resembling lead, and invented the Crookes tube, forerunner of the modern X-ray tube.

Born in 1832 and educated at Chippenham Grammar School, in Wiltshire, Crookes studied at the Royal College of Chemistry and was later employed in the meteorological department of the Radcliffe Observatory, Oxford. In 1856 he started publication of "The Chemical News," a journal of which he remained editor-proprietor for nearly half a century. Frequently consulted by the Government on scientific matters, he served as President of the Royal Society, the British Association and the Institution of Electrical Engineers. He was knighted in 1897 and was one of the original members of the Order of Merit.

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